

*THE SMILE
of the SPHINX*

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Marguerite Bouvet

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THE
SMILE OF THE SPHINX



“You are teaching me the meaning of heaven upon earth,”
she murmured dreamily

[Chapter XXIII]

THE SMILE OF THE SPHINX

BY
MARGUERITE BOUVET

Author of "Sweet William," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. S. DE LAY



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*The author wishes to express her thanks and gratitude
to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell for granting to her permis-
sion to quote several passages from his poetic works*

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To You

Who have inspired the better pages of this book; to you who wear—not the smile of the Sphinx, inscrutable, impenetrable, unchanging—but the genial smile of friendliness and good-fellowship, unashamed of its sincerity and candor; the smile that reflects heart and soul from the crystalline alembic of a mind distilling none but fresh pure thoughts, leaving no riddle to be solved, but prompting the question: “Why are there not more in the world like you?”

*"By thine own tears thy
Song must tears beget."*

—CATULLUS.

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THE SMILE OF THE SPHINX

CHAPTER I

THE DOLLIVERS IN TOWN

*"Some for the Glories of this World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!"*

IT was a chill, gray afternoon in late November. A sharp wind was clipping through the bare trees of the avenue with a wailing note. A fine, persistent rain fell and froze upon the broad flagstones, leaving its frosted patterns upon the glistening window panes of the great mansions that overlooked the street; not a very cheerful outlook or salubrious atmospheric condition for poor Mrs. Dolliver, who suffered keenly with rheumatism and from a deep, habitual depression. To-day, her mental depression

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was enhanced by the fact that she was separated for the first time in her life from her only child, "Tildy."

Two weeks had passed since her sixteen-year-old Matilda left for the "Seminary." To the longing mother it seemed almost like three years, and the inclement weather only added to her melancholy state of mind. She drew her chair a little closer to the open fire in the grate. She felt strangely cold and nervous in her new environment, in spite of the cheery blaze. She glanced at her husband who sat with his head buried in his newspaper, and wondered how he could be so contented. Her gaze wandered from him to the high, gorgeously decorated walls and ceiling, across the broad stretch of velvet carpet, the massive folding doors, the rich furnishings, and she could not repress the sigh that came to her lips. The grandeur and loneliness of it all, without "Tildy" to comfort and help her bear it!

"Ario," she said at last, feeling that she must break the intolerable silence, "it just seems like it could n't be!"

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"Like what couldn't be?" inquired Mr. Dolliver, complacently, as he tilted the end of his nose and the rims of his gold spectacles slightly above his paper.

"Why, Tildy's being away like this. I don't see how I'm ever going to stand it four years!"

"There, there, there, Emmy," returned Mr. Dolliver, in a tone meant to be soothing. "It's just because you ain't used to it. When Matildy comes home at week's-end, and you find how pleased she is with it all, she'll liven you up, I reckon; she'll make you feel all right about it."

Mr. Dolliver himself was of a placid, rather easy-going temperament, undisturbed by such trifling things as the vagaries of the weather or the feminine mind. He never troubled himself with any of the lesser anxieties of life. The rise and fall of the stock-market were of far more import to him than the constant fluctuations of the barometer.

"You know she wanted it herself, more'n anybody," he went on, serenely, for to do him justice, Ario Dolliver was always ready to stop and dis-

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cuss any topic with his "Emmy" — tolerantly, sometimes, perhaps, but never impatiently.

"She's that ambitious, is Tildy! — proud as Lucifer himself. There she's just like her father. Mark what I say, Mrs. D., we'll be proud of that girl some day." Ario's round, chubby face beamed all over with satisfaction as he voiced these sentiments.

"I'm pleased with her as she is," meekly averred Mrs. Dolliver, who could see naught but perfection in her only child.

"To be sure we are," complied Mr. Dolliver. "But that's not enough. A handsome youngster like Matildy's got to grow up an ornament to society. To do that, she's got to be properly edjicated, and I reckon I've hit on the best way of doing it, sending her to that Pettingill Seminary. Fashionable school that, I'm told. You must try and get over those sentimental notions about keeping her tied to your apron-strings till she's a woman. This here old-fashioned idea of "tooting" girls at home don't amount to shucks in these days of learnin' and

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progress. She's got to gradgiate in some fine institootion like the Pettingill. Only real swells go there." Mr. Dolliver smoothed his waistcoat over his capacious paunch with a satisfied air; already he basked in the reflected glory of the Misses Pettingills' eminently respectable establishment.

"How much is it a year?" he pondered with placid zest. "Let me think: twelve—thirteen hundred, without music.

"Well, I don't mind for Tildy. If she's ambitious to be a fine lady, like those she's with, I'll not be the one to hold her back—not me! Millions talk these days, Mrs. D., and why shouldn't Tildy hold her own beside the very best? I can afford it; and I'll allow that she'll be a dashing young heiress, some day."

Mrs. Dolliver gazed at her husband with a kind of awe and stupefaction. She always grew silent when he began on his "highty, flighty" projects, as she called them. His ambition always soared to planes she could never hope to reach, and they frightened her more quiet

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and humble nature into whose narrow circle the possibilities of his millions could not penetrate.

He had been successful in business from his boyhood up. Money-making had become with him an absorbing passion, without disturbing in the least his devotion to his wife and daughter, or his love for his home and its cheerful comforts. He had begun by trundling a basket of small wares from door to door in the country town in which he lived. At twenty-one he opened a humble but prosperous small general store where he had collected a most ingenious assortment of commodities for the benefit of his customers; everything imaginable, from a hat-pin to a feather-bed.

With the aid of his young wife, "Emmy," a mild, sweet-natured girl who early recognized his ability and worshipped all his decrees as though voiced by an oracle, they rapidly established a flourishing trade. His shrewdness and success became proverbial. "As lucky as young Dolliver" was a simile pregnant with meaning in the small town.

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But the strongest and most striking factor in his prosperity was his unflinching integrity. People said that he "made money hand over fist," but every dollar of it was as "clean as a whistle."

Thus he grew to be an influential man, a power in the municipal affairs of his native place. There were many jealous ones who turned to ridicule his "vulgar success," and who condemned his bombastic manner of dictating; but no one ever questioned his equity or his perfect fairness and justice in all his dealings. In time this trait won for him the respect of the entire community, as well as the loyalty and regard of his employees. Anyway, Success always commands respect, just as it gives one the right to be dictatorial.

When Mr. Dolliver's interests were finally removed to Baltimore, it was his company of clerks and assistants who, wishing to show their appreciation of his many sterling qualities, held a prolonged session during which they drew up endless resolutions attesting Mr. Dolliver's

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many virtues, particularly that of turning everything he touched into money, finally resolving to appropriate a suitable sum out of the employees' common fund to present him and the worthy "Emmy" with a magnificent parlor suite of brilliant red plush. Fortunately, Mr. Dolliver's artistic taste was on a level with that of his clerks and drivers, and the gratitude with which he received the gift was boundless; the speech he made in response was memorable, and did him credit.

It must not be lost sight of that when Mr. Dolliver entered his home, he resolutely put all business cares behind him. They were banished, forgotten. He took a simple delight, therefore, whenever he occupied the largest of the arm-chairs, in testing the elasticity of its spring seat, his slippered feet barely touching the floor as he lolled his head against its cushioned back. Mr. Dolliver had never before sat in a luxurious chair of his own. The furnishings of the rooms above his country store were plain, haircloth antiquities. One by one the apartments that had

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been used as a home for his wife and child had been appropriated for storerooms. The home was literally crowded out. It had shrunk to three apartments, when one day the young heiress to the Dolliver millions of the future touched the kindling spark to the smouldering embers of Mr. Dolliver's pride, and he was induced to seek a domicile commensurate with his rising fortunes. It will thus be understood that Mr. Dolliver had outgrown his surroundings.

"It's a shame, mother, for us to be living in this way," Matilda had expostulated, with the raw warmth of youth. "The Hackerstown Savings Bank is building additions to its safety vaults. I know it is just to make room for father's money. Why aren't we living in a house like decent people?"

"You know your pa won't build a house in this small town." There was a plaintive note in her voice, a wistful light in her eyes that had grown with her husband's wealth. "His mind's made up to live in the city as soon as you're

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old enough to go to one of the schools there. His heart's set on that, though I know it'll most kill me to let you go away from home. But, Matilda, if you're not satisfied, why don't you speak to your pa?"

"I'll do it to-morrow," said Matilda, with sudden determination.

She was a bright-eyed girl of fifteen, with a keen, handsome face that gave promise of striking beauty with the gradual development of young womanhood. Her cheeks were flushed. Her mother's suggestion seemed to have kindled her long-cherished hopes to be allowed to go to a "seminary." She knew of girls who had been to these remarkable institutions, who returned to their homes greatly improved, "perfect ladies" in fact, and invariably made splendid matches with city gentlemen. She hated to be called a "country girl." She did not want to marry a country storekeeper, as her mother had done, and spend the rest of her life in Hackerstown.

She stood facing her mother, with chest heav-

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ing, her whole body quivering with alertness and desire to leap, like a youthful Diana, far, far away, to scenes unknown, lured thither because of their mystery. She was a picture as she stood there beside the wan, frail mother, her eyes aglow, her every nerve vibrant at the thought of going soon to one of those city schools where young girls, by some process incomprehensible to her, were transformed into women of the world. For Matilda Dolliver was, as her father had said, ambitious, and her aspirations were quite beyond her years. The gentle Mrs. Dolliver gazed at her daughter admiringly, a slight moisture coming into her eyes.

“Why, mother, you’re crying! What’s the matter?” Quickly she turned, gentle and tender, and bent over her mother with genuine solicitude.

“Is it what I said about being cooped up in these rooms?”

“No, Tildy; it’s nothing you’ve said or done; it’s just thinking we’ve got to go to Baltimore,

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sooner or later. Your pa says this place ain't big enough to hold him or his interests; that great, big city, it seems like we'd be lost in it. If it wasn't for doing what your pa thinks best, I'd be content to stay here in Hackerstown all my days."

"Oh, mother!" said the girl, reproachfully. "You don't really mean that?"

The look of disappointment in Matilda's eyes caused Mrs. Dolliver to say hastily:

"No, no, Tildy, I don't. I'll go, and willing, as soon as ever your pa is ready. I'll try and not think of myself. I suppose I'm nothing but a selfish old woman to feel as I do about it. But for mercy's sake, child, don't look so!"

For Matilda possessed not only ambition, but also those essential qualifications to success, patience—inherited, perhaps, from her long-suffering mother—and the dogged persistence of Ario Dolliver, who never allowed such obstacles as time or personal discomforts to thwart him in his chosen projects.

Matilda had already had her trials and

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humiliations resulting from the anomalous conditions in which she lived. She had borne them silently and stubbornly; but these early experiences were later to serve her and fortify her for the various conflicts she was to meet in her eagerly anticipated school life.

The time which Mrs. Dolliver dreaded was come. Matilda had gone to the Pettingill School, a fashionable and altogether worthy institution, frequented by the rich and poor alike so long as one had any claim to aristocracy whatsoever. Mr. Dolliver had met with some difficulty in entering his daughter. He actually did prove that one of his ancestors had fought, bled, and received honors in the Revolutionary War. But the genealogical line had been so dispersed that it was hard to recognize this fragment as belonging to the ancient tree. However, the thing had been effected, as were most of Mr. Dolliver's plans.

The week had been a dismal one. Combined with the inclement weather and the loneliness of her strange, new domicile, Mrs. Dolliver to-

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day felt the separation more keenly than she had at any former time in the past two weeks of her residence in the house of grandeur. She gazed at her husband, as she always did when he expounded his wisdom to convince her, and thought of what a wonderful man he had come to be, and how little she had dreamed that the plain but determined youth who had asked her to share his modest fortunes would one day be the owner of millions, and a powerful figure in the commercial world! It appalled her to think of it. The higher he rose the more humble and alone she felt. Unlike other wives in her condition she shrank more and more from keeping pace in the brilliant evolution through which her husband and her daughter were being so willingly and irresistibly propelled.

Mr. Dolliver could not quite fathom the depth of her gentler nature. He interpreted her mild-eyed look of trust into serene acquiescence, which was eminently satisfactory.

In his young daughter, however, he sought and met all the responsive chords attuned to the

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highest goal of his ambition. She was the one force outside himself that spurred him ever onward in his fearless and boundless career.

“There’s something mighty handy about a good edjication,” chuckled Mr. Dolliver, with evident contentment. “That’s something you and I didn’t get when we was young, Emmy—eh?”

“It’s not kept you from succeeding in everything you’ve turned your hand to, Ario,” remarked Mrs. Dolliver, pride shining in her eyes. “You’ve always been smart enough to please me,” and she continued to gaze at him fondly.

“Well, ’t was mere luck that brought you my way, Emmy dear,” returned Mr. Dolliver, gallantly. “You and I’ve pulled together mighty snug these—lemme see, how many years is it since?—well, it’s no matter; you’re just as young to me now as you ever was, Emmy. But with Matildy it’s altogether different: she wants *improvement*. She’s a great chit, is Matildy!”

Mr. Dolliver might have gone on indefinitely

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in his expansive mood had not a sudden ring at the door bell interrupted him, and caused him to bounce from his easy-chair with corresponding alacrity.

"Who can it be?" thought Mrs. Dolliver, dreading the possibility of having to receive any of her Hackerstown associates in these unaccustomed and strange surroundings.

"It's the postman," said Mr. Dolliver, returning with a look of immense gratification. "He's brought a letter from Tildy. That's something to hearten you up, Emmy."

Mrs. Dolliver clutched the letter and hurried to the nearest window to gaze for the first time at the unformed handwriting of their daughter, upon a letter addressed to them. "It's most too dark to see, Ario," said Mrs. Dolliver, trying with nervous hand to adjust her spectacles.

"Well, there goes Amanda's tea bell. Let's read it at table," said her husband, taking the letter. "It'll seem more like she's eating with us." At that moment the two heavy folding

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doors were parted, and their faithful maid of all work, Amanda, beckoned them in.

“Well, I reckon we’ve got light enough to see here,” exclaimed Mr. Dolliver, in a roar of laughter. “If Mandy hasn’t gone and lit up the whole chandelier! Whew! feels like I was setting down in one of them big New York hotels. There, set up right close to me, Emmy; you might be lonesome off so far. I ain’t quite got used to sech a big table for jest us two.” He was doing his best to live up to his newly acquired magnificence without showing embarrassment.

“Read Tildy’s letter,” said Mrs. Dolliver, still holding to one corner of the envelope.

“A letter!” cried Amanda, leaning familiarly over her master’s chair. “My sakes! What stylish letter paper! It’s just like Tildy to catch on to any new kink!”

Mr. Dolliver paused a moment to admire the fanciful monogram adorning the top of the first sheet. “I rather like that way of stamping a lady’s note paper, don’t you, Emmy? It’s like

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putting fine headings to your business sheets; it advertises your quality!"

"It looks very well," assented the gentle Emmy, casting eager glances at the scraggling words that told of her Tildy's feelings after two weeks' separation.

Mr. Dolliver began to read the letter aloud with some difficulty, pausing for breath after his perusal of the first page; but the mother's anxiety had already absorbed its import, and she sat quivering with impatience for him to turn the sheet.

"I reckon she ain't finding it all so gay and fine as she thought. Everything's new and strange to her there. I expect, mebbe, she's a little mite homesick."

"Homesick!" repeated Mrs. Dolliver, with moist eyes. "Oh, dear me, dear me, I wish she didn't have to do it!" And a strange feeling in her throat made her cover her face with her napkin.

"Tut, tut, she'll get all over that after a while. She'll come home in a week or two so proud and happy you won't know her by her

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distangy manners. Gosh! I wouldn't feel so bad, ma; you know she was the one that wanted it the most," argued Mr. Dolliver, by way of consolation. "Now, jest fall to on your victuals while I see what else she says for herself."

Poor Mrs. Dolliver, though Amanda pressed her with her most tempting dishes, could find no appetite until she heard more about her daughter.

Not so with Mr. Dolliver, however, who found the task of reading aloud on an empty stomach too difficult, and experienced a singular delight in giving out his daughter's words when his mouth was fullest. By the time they had read Matilda's letter, supper was finished and Mrs. Dolliver had recovered her usual spirits at the happy news that Matilda would spend Sunday with them at the following week's end. Ario took his wife's arm and they returned to the spacious drawing-room, which Mr. Dolliver insisted upon calling the "*salon*."

Amanda giggled and disappeared, while Mr. Dolliver lustily repeated the words: "*Le salon, le salon*—that's the French for parlor, so Matildy says. She's taking up the study of that

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language at the Pettingill, because she says French is the proper and *distangy* speech of most Continental courts."

Mrs. Dolliver accepted the dictates of both her husband and her daughter without question. Mr. Dolliver drew up his easy-chair nearer the electric lamp, took up his evening paper, polished his spectacles, and began to enjoy what he considered "solid comfort." He was, undoubtedly, a model husband. He neither smoked nor drank, nor entertained any dangerous, worldly habits. He had but one all-engrossing passion—money-making. To watch its miraculous multiplication under his magic touch had been sufficient game. He had no other hobby, that one having been sufficiently absorbing to discourage every other temptation. His sole recreation consisted in spending one or two evenings a week at home in the bosom of his family. The rest of his time was passed at his down-town offices, where he sat weaving and sorting the golden threads of his great mercantile problems, and laying the plans that were to construct, a few years hence, his fabulous fortune.

CHAPTER II

MATILDA COMES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE SMILE

*"Wake! For the Sun who scatter'd into flight
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n,
and strikes
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light."*

THE Misses Pettingills' school was situated far down-town, almost in the business section of Baltimore, in spite of which fact it had retained its high prestige and distinguished *clientèle* from some of the most aristocratic and wealthiest quarters of the city. It was a quaint old structure, built in the architecture of several generations ago. It still retained its broad frontage of four tiers of iron-railed verandas rising above the Venetian arcade that formed its main entrance, and presented an aspect altogether striking when viewed among the great towering

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buildings that had long since crowded it out of its cheery atmosphere of home.

Matilda's first impression of it was one of gloom and gray shadows. As she stepped beneath the cool arcade her girlish ardor suffered its first shock of restraint. The life of absolute freedom and independence which she had been accustomed to enjoy at home seemed suddenly shut out. The superstructure of green railings suggested a mammoth bird-cage in which many gay-plumed birds were imprisoned. A tall, ceremonious butler, white-gloved and silver-trayed, admitted them finally to the mystic precincts of refinement and culture for which the Pettingill School was far-famed.

Unfortunately, Mr. Dolliver was not prepared with visiting cards; but with characteristic *sang-froid* he tore off a sheet from one of his business note-books and scribbled hastily: "Ario Emerson Dolliver, and daughter," after which they were ushered into the vast drawing-room where the Misses Pettingill received their new pupils.

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Mr. Dolliver pompously sat down in the most conspicuous chair and began to scrutinize his dignified surroundings. There were long rows of books enclosed in tall glass cases, a few pieces of strictly classic statuary and several remarkable pictures upon the sedate walls.

"Well, how d' you think you're going to like it here, Tildy?" he asked, assuming an air of ease, but anxiously searching her countenance. He was manifestly impressed, testimony that the Misses Pettingill had not vainly created this chaste, scholastic atmosphere.

"Oh, I'll like it all right," said Matilda, calmly determined to let nothing sway her from her chosen purpose.

"'Cause, you know," her father went on, "if you don't like it here you can go somewheres else. I can afford to put you in any school you like."

"We've already selected this one, father," said the girl, "and I'm satisfied."

"That settles it, then!" and Mr. Dolliver, already feeling upon intimate terms with

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Minerva, began to strut about the room, giving vent to a low whispering whistle, which was his habit, examining the various pieces of statuary with a mild degree of amazement that such damaged objects could bear any value, artistic or otherwise—notably the Flying Victory of Samothrace. He was on the point of expressing himself warmly on the subject of classic art, when the door opened and two ladies entered.

“Mr. Dolliver,” said the elder of the two, after a momentary inspection of the callers, “I am most gratified to make your acquaintance. I am Miss Pettingill.”

There could be no mistaking this fact. She carried herself with an oppressive air of dignity that proclaimed her assurance in every movement. Her countenance was austere, and she was tall and very thin.

“Miss Pettingill, ma’am,” Mr. Dolliver saluted, with a low bow, “I’m proud to know you! This is my daughter, Tildy, that I’ve come to place under your tootership.”

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The austere countenance turned slowly toward the girl.

"Matilda, am I right in presuming?" inquired the elder Miss Pettingill in a precise tone which marked the correction and at the same time reproved Mr. Dolliver's careless speech.

"My name is Matilda," the girl shyly admitted. But her attention was far more taken by the other lady, who as yet had not spoken, but stood gracefully at ease during the introduction and greetings, surveying Matilda with a kind, smiling regard and now and then glancing at the father. She was so quiet and self-possessed and sympathetic that the girl unconsciously responded to the appeal of her personality.

Noting the transfer of her visitors' interest, Miss Pettingill perforce presented her.

"Miss Doyle, who is kind enough to assist me to-day, my sister feeling quite too ill to pursue her customary duties."

There was an inarticulate murmur of solicitude from Mr. Dolliver, which was faintly

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echoed by Matilda; then he made a profound obeisance to Miss Doyle.

She was a young woman of singularly fine and wax-like appearance, evidently not far removed in years from Matilda's age. She was dressed in deep mourning, which costume contrasted strangely with the youthfulness of her face and the obvious seriousness of her duties as *locum tenens*. She took Matilda's hand, and the younger girl's heart went out to the repressed warmth of the act and the smile that still played upon her lips and sparkled in her eyes. So, also, did Mr. Dolliver respond to the unspoken sympathy of this beautiful girl. His look was continually reverting in the direction of the young assistant, even as he carried on the necessary conversation with the elder Miss Pettingill.

"I take it, Miss Pettingill, ma'am, you've got the right sort of accommodations for these young things to romp and gambol out-of-doors. You see, Tildy's been brought up in the country. She's used to sunshine and plenty of fresh air," he was saying, rather doubting his assump-

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tion of the fact from Miss Pettingill's somewhat dark and sallow complexion and the extreme pallor of Miss Doyle's.

"Mr. Dolliver, my dear sir," — the elevated brows now implied resentment — "we have ample facilities for out-of-door exercise and recreation. Miss Doyle," turning to the young woman, "kindly conduct Mr. Dolliver and Miss Matilda through Juno's Court that they may judge for themselves. It is near the recess hour and in a minute or two the young ladies will all be out promenading."

But the prospect of meeting a bevy of fashionable young ladies promenading quenched Mr. Dolliver's desire for investigation.

"Not at all necessary, ma'am, I'll take your word for it. But me and my wife was jest discussin' these various points of sanitation. In these days of learnin' and progress everything must be at the top-notch of perfection, ma'am."

"Let me assure you, my dear Mr. Dolliver, that our establishment is fully equipped with all the appliances and conditions necessary to the

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health and welfare of our young ladies," and Miss Pettingill's neck and nose attained such a point of elevation that Mr. Dolliver hastily replied:

"'Nuff said, Miss Pettingill, ma'am—'nuff said. We was sure we'd made no mistake in sending our Tildy to your worthy institootion." With which gallant speech he prepared to take leave of his daughter.

Matilda showed no undue emotion at parting with her father. She seemed quite contented to be placed under the protection of the smiling young woman, never having questioned or doubted in her own mind the success of her school life. When, therefore, Mr. Dolliver left Pettingill Seminary that morning it was with that sense of security and satisfaction which he liked to meet in all his transactions.

As he galloped away in his hired carriage, he was blissfully unconscious of the eyes that peered at him from behind the green railings up stairs, or of the agitation and number of unflattering remarks that followed his modest exodus. For,

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quite contrary to the elder Miss Pettingill's surmise that all the young ladies were recreating in Juno's Court,—spacious behind those quadrangular walls,—many of them had rushed to their rooms to peer out at the father of the newcomer. His fame had evidently preceded him. It was known that he was immensely rich. They saw the Dolliver wagons passing through their quiet street every day. For he had now risen to the dignity of a manufacturer of daily commodities, and was widely known by the commercial world of Baltimore.

Judgments about him ran high in the scale of exaggeration and were, of course, diversified. The young ladies of Pettingill Seminary could form no opinion from the glimpse they had caught of him as he rode away in his cab. They were consumed with curiosity to see his daughter. But the fact that in his earlier career he had been a "penny grocer," went far to prejudice them against her.

As Matilda passed out of the drawing-room under Miss Doyle's chaperonage, Miss Pet-

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tingill shot a significant glance at the young assistant, a look freighted with meaning and which Hélène Doyle understood and acknowledged with her usual enigmatical smile. Miss Pettingill remained seated, apparently lost in meditation as she watched the two young women pass out of her sight. She wondered if she had done right to admit this young person of low degree into her flock of high-bred girls. She shuddered at the recollection that Mr. Dolliver, in his brief conversation, had twice used the expression "we was." She hoped Miss Doyle had noticed it, and taken due account of the enormity of her task; for she had been previously informed that Matilda Dolliver would be her especial care. It would be her pleasant task to correct, refine, civilize, and instruct the uncouth damsel in all the polished ways and usages of good society.

Hélène Doyle was certainly fitted for the task, having herself been born and reared under the highly cultured influences of the Pettingill School. This young woman might have rebelled

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at the ignominious duties sometimes imposed upon her, if rebellion had been allowed at such a well-regulated academy. But it was not. The Pettingill Seminary for young ladies was conducted in every respect with military order and precision. Nonconformity to its rules and regulations was an undreamed-of contingency among pupils and teachers. One would no more have dared to oppose the elder Miss Pettingill's plan of action or decision than if she had been the commander-in-chief of an army preparing to attack a formidable enemy. Her word was absolute and irrevocable. Whatever were the reasons for this *coup d'état* in the harmonious and unsuspecting circle that constituted her well-ordered establishment were, therefore, best known to herself.

The younger Miss Pettingill who was in every particular the exact counterpart of her sister, — only less aggressively so, — entertained the secret opinion that nothing but the certainty and munificence of Mr. Dolliver's bank checks had clinched her sister's final decision.

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Miss Pettingill, the elder, sat some moments apparently lost in profound meditation. How long she might have remained thus is beyond conjecture, if the younger Miss Pettingill, whose violent headache was conquered by curiosity, had not come tip-toeing down to learn the result of the first interview.

"My dear sister," she burst forth in excited whispers, "I've just met her crossing the Court with Hélène Doyle!"

"*Miss Doyle*," corrected the elder woman with reproving gravity; "*Miss Doyle*, chaperon and assistant instructress at the Pettingill School, is not to be confounded with Hélène Doyle, the former pupil. Will you never learn to observe the formalities, sister? Please endeavor to bear in mind hereafter that it is *Miss Doyle*."

The younger Miss Pettingill was properly contrite after this rebuke; observing which the elder Miss Pettingill inquired with much condescension: "And what do you think of her?"

"Rather a good-looking girl on the whole," was the chastened reply. But seeing at once

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from her sister's severe expression that this was not the precise answer expected or desired, she made haste to add: "Her eyes and hair are quite nice, but her taste in dress is atrocious. She is awkward and ungainly. Her native deportment must be moulded and chiselled like a piece of rough marble."

The elder Miss Pettingill's own unexpressed opinion being thus affirmed, she permitted herself to be mollified.

"Miss Doyle will effect this change if it can be done. It will take time and perseverance on her part. Judging from the father's conversation, Matilda Dolliver's parents are extremely ordinary people." And the elder Miss Pettingill whispered a few of Mr. Dolliver's pet aphorisms in her sister's ear lest the air might again be vitiated by their repetition.

"Shocking!" exclaimed the other lady, though less perturbed than her sister by the discovery. "I will endeavor to assist poor Hèle—Miss Doyle in her herculean task!"

The look of approval on her sister's face caused

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the younger Miss Pettingill to retire promptly upon her errand of helpfulness. She joined the young women in Juno's Court, where she liked to go during the recreation hours and where she was more or less of a favorite with the pupils. A few of the younger enthusiasts immediately surrounded her, putting their arms about her waist, school-girl fashion, and plying her with eager questions about the new arrival.

"Oh, dear Miss 'Pett,' do tell us all about her. Has she really come to stay?"

"Most certainly! And why not, my dears? Isn't Pettingill Seminary capable of transforming any diamond in the rough, even as rough a diamond as Matilda Dolliver? For I will tell you something in strict confidence, something not to be repeated, mark you!" — and the injudicious Miss Pettingill related to these artless young ladies her sister's stupefaction at Mr. Dolliver's frequent use of "we was." Guileless Miss Pettingill! What are you storing up for this, your latest charge!

"They must be common people, of course,

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but very rich. Money is a powerful thing these days, as Mr. Dolliver himself says. If Matilda shows a receptive nature, you will be surprised at the change in her after a short residence here."

The younger Miss Pettingill was as unsophisticated as the most innocent of her young ladies, but even her simple mind realized suddenly that she had been decidedly too free with her confidences, and she made haste to add: "Come, let us go and make her acquaintance. Miss Doyle will present us. And do be cautious not to repeat what I have said!" The young ladies of course promised great secrecy, and went willingly to pay their respects to the "rich Miss Dolliver."

Poor Matilda was a little abashed by this peremptory meeting with a host of young girls so entirely different from herself. In her imagination their polite curiosity marked hostility, and she felt the awkwardness of her situation and saw at a glance the wide gulf that separated her from them. So she met their well-trained advances coldly, a little defiantly, at first, feeling conscious

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of her own inelegance. Her feet were not so daintily shod as theirs, her gown of not so fashionable a cut. Her gold-brown hair was parted with rural simplicity and hung in two long braids.

The group that surrounded her were among "the elect" of Pettingill Seminary; chief among which were the swan-necked Miss Angela Atwood and her sister Maud, who held their heads above most of the other pupils, and assumed the air of injured queens when required to perform any act of common civility. They touched Matilda's hand lightly with their slender finger-tips, expressing some trite sentiment of welcome, which rang insincere. Miss Dolliver was quick to resent the scorn that accompanied their greeting. Young and inferior as she was, her pride was sufficiently sensitive to be angered more than cowed by their condescension. Her only reply was a flash from her dark eyes and a "Thank you," that admitted of no further intercourse between them.

Miss Hélène Doyle, who was curiously studying her new charge, was rather pleased to see her

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display so much spirit. Those Atwood girls were insufferable; they posed as social leaders in the school, ruling and imposing upon their friends with fine superiority. Hélène Doyle knew their influence and tried to turn the tide of their unfavorable impression by drawing Edith Hadley into the group. The fair Edith was a great favorite among her mates owing to her amiable disposition and attractive personality. She would act as a counterpoise to the Atwood disdain. Her hearty grasp of the hand won Matilda immediately and the latter began to recover her natural self-possession, after the sudden plunge into this totally new sphere of existence.

“You are going to take up all the arts, I suppose, along with the regular studies, drawing, dancing, music, singing!” — and Edith uttered the last word with rapturous longing.

“I have everything to learn,” said Matilda humbly.

“Are you fond of music? I *love* it, especially singing. I’m wild to go to Europe and study with the great masters!”

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"You must have a voice," suggested Matilda.

"Oh, the girls here say I sing well enough, but I should like to do something larger."

"I don't know whether I have any talent, but my father wants me to take the whole course."

"Isn't that splendid!" exclaimed Edith, devoutly wishing she had a father who could satisfy her every wish. "Have you a preference for any special study?"

"I want very much to learn to speak French," the novice timidly offered.

"Oh, that's good! We all prefer it to German. It is such a bright, racy language. Miss Doyle teaches it and speaks it perfectly. You will find it so useful when you travel abroad."

Matilda laughed a little at the prospect. "That seems very far away," she added. "I have so much to do in the four years before me."

Miss Doyle joined them at this point, and the three went off to finish their promenade together.

"Now, that's the way I like to hear a girl talk," said one of the young ladies left standing with

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the younger Miss Pettingill. "She's not so bad, and she seems to have lots of good sense."

"Didn't I tell you so?" returned Miss Pettin-gill, glad of this opportunity to retract.

"She's going to come out all right," said another. "I think she'll be quite handsome when she puts on some good-looking clothes," with which promising predictions the young ladies all went in at the sound of the gong.

Thus entered Matilda into that select fold of virgins presided over by the Misses Pettingill.

CHAPTER III

HÉLÈNE DOYLE AND HER ÉNTOURAGE

*"I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as were some buried Cæsar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head."*

THE tall, exquisitely moulded young woman who had been chosen to chaperon and practically take charge of Matilda Dolliver's mental and physical advancement, enjoyed the rare distinction of being every one's friend at the Pettingill School. Furthermore, she was sought, consulted, and appealed to by her entire circle of acquaintances in and out of the seminary. Her judgment being always prudent and discerning was asked upon all weighty subjects. She possessed to an exceptional degree that well-poised attitude of high breeding which places every one at ease, whatever his character or station. Her

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presence in any community diffused calm, repose, and harmony without visible effort on her part. Her quiet, low-pitched conversational voice seemed the index to a restful, sympathetic temperament. Those who met her in almost daily contact held this opinion.

Yet Hélène Doyle had somewhere hidden within her sentient being, a warm, impulsive, emotional nature which she concealed absolutely under the mystic smile that won for her the popular name of the "Smiling Sphinx," the "Mona Lisa," and like classic epithets from the young ladies of the Pettingill School. Many of her intimates marvelled at her perfect self-government. That apparently placid mien which accepted all that came into her life with equally smiling serenity; could it be inborn? — or inherited from either parent? It might be from the big-hearted, wide-souled man who was her father. Every one in Baltimore remembered the tall, genial old man who had ministered so faithfully to one of the largest and poorest congregations in the city for upwards of forty years.

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Hélène's scintillating mental attributes might easily be traced to the spiritual Dr. Doyle; but the ever-smiling reserve, the passive, undemonstrative element restraining all attempts at too close familiarity surely she obtained from the mother.

Mrs. Doyle was still a young, rather attractive woman, and the people of their congregation discussed long and extensively the puzzling fact that two persons of such widely differing tastes should have elected to spend their lives together. Singularly enough, the union of these polemic extremities of temperament re-occur constantly in our generation. Yet the result had proved surprisingly satisfactory to the parties concerned.

The Rev. Dr. Doyle was too high-minded ever to have garnered more than a scant sufficiency for his own small family. His wife, on the contrary, was entirely self-engrossed and self-centered; absorbed in her own and her family's interests exclusively. She had no patience with her husband's extravagant ideas of charity, and kept up a perpetual worrying and fretting that never

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appeared to ruffle the good Doctor's amiable mood. She belonged to that class of women who, in spite of their weak, petty natures, assume a kind of power and supremacy over the yielding members of their own household; but relapse into abject humility and submission in the presence of those keen enough to pose as superiors.

Early in her daughter's infancy she had conceived her education with a heroic, almost Spartan, rigidity. The child's education was to be paramount. Nothing should retard the march of her progress. In spite of the slender income Hélène must move onward to become a great scholar like her father. His mind was full of high and noble things: she must attain his perfection, and lose no time in the unnecessary progress of growing up. Mrs. Doyle had inherited a small *dot* from a French grandmother, but that would not be enough. Little Hélène was perpetually impressed with the fact that she would have to be self-sufficient. In order to fit herself for this, she must enter the Pettingill Academy at the earliest stage of her girlhood. Mrs. Doyle,

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in spite of her many weaknesses, was a person of action. She had outlined and formed plans for her daughter's career extending from her birth to the age of twenty. At four Hélène was to be taken to M. Lemaire's for private tutoring in Greek and Latin; at thirteen she was to enter the renowned Pettingill School; at seventeen take a chair in some college, or marry, — all this, with the lightning rapidity of an expert mathematical computator. She had taken the entire control and government of the child, relieving the gentle Doctor of all disciplinary responsibility owing to his church duties, which were manifold, and also because she took a special maternal joy in exercising her role of petty tyrant.

Poor little Hélène was not even suffered to have the measles or any of the childish interruptions common to children, in peace and comfort, but was hurried out of bed several days sooner than is usually customary in such cases. No trifling causes should be allowed to impede the course of her education. When she should leave Pettingill at seventeen she must be ready to begin

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her career of instructor the following Autumn. Thus Mrs. Doyle's well-laid plans must work out their fruition without any hateful obstacles. She would have her daughter's education, love affairs, or professional career march on with clock-like regularity and persistence.

The direct opposite of her patient, generous husband, Mrs. Doyle peppered his daily existence with petty reproaches. She harped constantly on the inconvenience and aggravation of being poor. She found fault with him continually for indulging too freely in his eccentric notions of giving to the poor of his parish.

"What is the use of pampering such people with comforts they've never been used to? It only cultivates in them a taste for ease and sensuousness incompatible with their lives, and creates a demand for more. Their natures are not refined or sensitive like ours. We suffer more by the lack of certain necessary luxuries than they do from hunger or cold."

"My dear, you seem unduly agitated about something to-day," said Doctor Doyle, lifting

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his mild eyes upon her. For he was in his private study revising an old sermon to adapt it to a more modern application.

"That is what you always say when I'm anxious about something."

"Anxious, my love? You ought to be anxious about nothing. Worry will fade your pretty cheeks and bring lines around your bright eyes. Tell me what troubles you."

She drew nearer, invited by his extended hand, and laid her other hand upon his shoulder.

"You know H  l  ne must shortly go to the Pettingill Seminary. It is so expensive and yet she must stand on a level with her rich social friends. The Atwood girls, the Hadleys, all her playmates are to enter in the Fall."

"And you worry about the expense? You little Martha! Have not the means always been provided? Cease from troubling; all will be well with my little daughter. Heaven has prepared a high place for her in this world of joys and sorrows. I have no fear. Wait God's good time."

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Mrs. Doyle was quieted by his soothing, always beautiful faith. But her restless, active spirit was only temporarily allayed by his wise counsel.

From these two diametrically opposite minds the daughter derived a composite nature, the feminine element merging in singular conformity the best characteristics of both parents into a pleasing whole.

Hélène had now reached her nineteenth year, yet without having fulfilled her mother's high ambition of attaining a scientific or mathematical chair in one of America's leading colleges. True, unavoidable interruptions had intervened. The beloved father had quietly passed out of their lives, his only legacy to his daughter being the great heart and noble mind that had been his only motive force to conquer and achieve much in the great ends of a spiritual world.

Mrs. Doyle wept his loss and shrouded herself in mourning garb. She tearfully consented to Hélène's taking a position at the Pettingill

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School to instruct and chaperon young ladies but a few years her juniors.

“I never dreamed of such a cataclysm of all my hopes!” she bewailed. “Now that your dear father is gone, I have no power to think, to act. You must take his place. You must upbear me and comfort me!”

Hélène had already proved herself the stronger nature, by setting aside her own grief to alleviate her mother's, by taking all the decisive steps of their lamentable condition. At the Pettingill School she was welcomed by the young ladies as a superior companion. The Misses Pettingill regarded her as a veritable treasure, but were too Napoleonic in their manœuvres to acknowledge it. Here, too, she found entertainment and distraction in the young life about her, and subjects sufficient to cheer her disconsolate mother when she went home.

The account of the arrival of the new pupil at Pettingill Seminary was an effective rouser to Mrs. Doyle. She immediately looked up and began to take interest in the things and people

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that surrounded her. She questioned her daughter constantly about Matilda, and made inquiries about the family among the sympathetic friends who came to condole with her. The chief thing she could learn about the Dollivers was that they were immensely rich, but honest and worthy people whose one object in life seemed to be to educate, refine, and ennoble their young daughter. They were doing everything that could be done for a child.

“How extremely interesting!” exclaimed Mrs. Doyle. “If it were not for my mourning, I would at once call upon Mrs. Dolliver. I am sure we should find one bond of sympathy in common—our daughters. And thus I should be following the wishes of my beloved husband by calling immediately upon new members of our church. Oh, how it would please him, now, if he could know I took more interest in church affairs! But, you understand, during his lifetime I could not neglect my home duties, nor my responsibilities in regard to Hélène. It was all I could do to get the child ready in time for Sunday-school. And

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invariably afterwards I would suffer with one of those splitting headaches! Hélène and her father never knew what headaches were. I used to tell them they did not know the meaning of suffering. I always said it was because their minds were gifted and therefore more active. Have you ever noticed that really great and gifted people never mention the subject of headache? Whereas, comparatively brainless people like you and me are forever complaining."

"There is, no doubt, a great deal of truth in the modern idea that the mind controls the body to a remarkable degree," said the unoffended visitor.

"That is just what Hélène is always telling me. And if you'll believe me, that young Dr. Rasburn has the same notion, only he is more sympathetic."

Mrs. Doyle could go on for hours expatiating about her pet maladies when she found some one willing to listen. Dr. Rasburn, who had been called during Dr. Doyle's last illness, was now her daily visitor. She found endless comfort in

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retailing to him all her various complaints, while he with keen professional insight directed the conversation to topics of general social interest. He entertained her so adroitly about the newcomers that one day Mrs. Doyle asked Hélène to bring Matilda Dolliver home with her.

“We might make it an occasion for asking a few others who have been so very kind during our trouble; the Hadley girls and Benedict, of course, and Dr. Rasburn who desires to meet Matilda. He has told me so much that interests me about the family. I see no reason why we should not have a quiet little social gathering of a very few intimates.”

“Certainly,” replied Hélène, welcoming the slightest evidence of her mother’s returning spirits. “We might ask them for next Monday. It will be the first week of vacation, and I should think agreeable to every one. Is there any one else whom you would like to ask?”

“Perhaps the Atwoods?”

“No, not the Atwoods, mother,” objected Hélène. “This must be so very quiet and

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informal, and you know the Atwoods entertain elaborately. Their presence alone would transform our simple 'afternoon' into a formidable affair."

"Then, why not ask Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver? I have been wishing to meet Matilda's mother; but in my position, it is impossible for me to call. Perhaps they will understand."

"That will be very pleasant," Hélène acquiesced. "They will stand upon no ceremony. They will gladly welcome an occasion where Matilda will be the social attraction."

"It is very sweet of you, Hélène, to think of diverting me from my present loneliness. Now write our invitations, my daughter," added Mrs. Doyle, whose inclination was to be ceremonial in whatever she did.

"That will hardly be necessary," explained Hélène with an amused look. "An invitation would be rather too formal for Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver. It might intimidate them. We can easily reach every one by telephone. That will savor more of the *intimité de famille*."

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Hélène had met Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver several times during their visits at school, and she chose this way of doing them a kindness. The other friends whom they asked were all prepared to take the Dollivers at their face value. Therefore she feared no friction or embarrassment in their contact with one another. Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver would have no cause to feel their position of *déclassés*. Matilda had won too many friends in her first year's schooling. She had conquered almost every one except the Atwood girls who were too fundamentally snobs to be touched by Matilda's rapid development.

It was at the close of the last school term. The Spring had swung round with unusual vigor, and the atmosphere at Pettingill Seminary had relaxed into a social warmth characteristic of young women who have lived, thought, and worked side by side for the better part of a year.

Among those drawn into the circle that had accepted Matilda was the blonde Edith, youngest of the Hadley sisters. According to youthful

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enthusiasm she had “raved” at home about her new friend — her quiet, unostentatious manner, her father’s wealth and the royal yet simple use she made of it. The elder sisters were naturally eager to meet this phenomenon. Sophie, who was short of forty and felt she was fast bordering on “old maidism,” naturally held skeptical views.

“How can she be such a paragon of perfection with such antecedents! Didn’t you say her father was a cheap grocer in Hackerstown and that her mother measured out prunes and dried apples by the half-pound?”

“All the more credit to them for rising where they are now,” retorted Edith, who entertained strictly democratic views on the subject. “It would be better for our social position to-day if we had had one or two grocers or shoemakers on our ancestral tree instead of poets and philosophers whose legacy to us is something short of beggardom!” she protested warmly.

“Come, girls, don’t wax so eloquent over those

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innocent Dollivers," interposed Lucy. "What shall you wear to Mrs. Doyle's 'afternoon?'"

"I shan't go, for one," said Sophie. "I've nothing to wear, as usual; and I'm too busy with my essay on 'The Influence of Heredity over Environment' for the Woman's Club."

"Why, the dotted challis you've just made over, with that handsome lace from Aunt Mary's collar, is just the thing," suggested Lucy. "I think we ought to go. An invitation from Mrs. Doyle at this particular time is a great compliment."

"I shall wear my blue organdie. That's always becoming," complied Edith, dancing away with a pretty *tra-la-la*, to press it out for the occasion.

"That's right, look your prettiest; I hear Benedict Travis is to be there," called out Lucy.

"It won't do a bit of good," resumed Sophie pessimistically. "They say he's seen Matilda at church, and is crazy to meet her."

"So is Dr. Rasburn, I hear," said Lucy.

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“Well, I don’t see where the attraction is,” snapped Sophie, “unless it’s the money,” and marched off to inspect her old challis gown.

The select “afternoon” at the quiet, refined home on St. John’s Street, following their first period of mourning, was an uncommonly pleasant affair. Every one invited was present. Even the Atwood ladies who were not, dropped in to call, by mere coincidence, towards the latter part of the day, and were compelled to shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver who seemed to be the life of the party.

“It is a perfect mystery to me,” observed Maud as the three stepped stiffly into their glittering car, feeling that they had been slighted, “why every one seems to make so much of that girl. Did you notice Mrs. Doyle’s arm around her when she was being introduced?”

“It is on Hélène’s account,” said Angela. “You know she has grown fond of Matilda in spite of having been with her so constantly.”

“That was the Misses Pettingills’ policy,” said the mother. “It may not be altogether sincere.

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Hélène Doyle does not show her feelings. But did you notice those young men surrounding her like a blockade? They could hardly tear themselves away long enough to be polite to us! There is certainly a kind of magnetic attraction about that young person which I should be sorry to see in *my* daughters. It will play the mischief somewhere." Mother Atwood closed her lips very tightly after this prophetic utterance and gathered up her silken skirts about her with effusion.

"I hope not with Hélène," pursued Maud, malevolently.

"It is very likely to be. Where do we stop next, daughters?"

"At the Del Bondios'; it is the nearest point on our way," said Angela, turning to direct the chauffeur.

"Very well, I shall inform them of my sentiments regarding Miss Dolliver, for I should like to know *their* aristocratic opinion on the subject."

The Atwood motor-car sped around the corner, leaving but slight impression of its occupants

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upon the selected company at Mrs. Doyle's. Hélène, however, was not at all concerned about the impression Matilda had produced upon her friends; but rather what effect they had produced upon her.

"How did you enjoy them?" she asked as she helped Matilda on with her wrap upstairs.

"You know what I think of the Atwoods," said Matilda smiling.

"I don't mean them, I mean the others."

"They are dears, all of them," returned Matilda, gently pressing her friend's hand. "I was so glad to meet the two elder Hadley girls. Sophie is so original and droll, and Lucy is a darling."

"And Dr. Rasburn, and Benedict?"

"Oh, Benedict, — he is by far the more attractive of the two. He is a *protégé* of yours, is he not?"

"We played together when children. We have been friends a long time. I hope you will like him. He is going home with you, Dr. Rasburn with the Hadleys."

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“I will try to, for your sake,” and Matilda leaned forward to kiss H  l  ne — the first time in their year’s acquaintance.

“That was a successful little affair,” said Mrs. Doyle as the last guest left the house, “and all owing to you, H  l  ne. You always manage to bring together people who will not clash or ruffle each other. That is the true art of entertaining, a trait which you must have inherited from my side of the family.”

Thus it happened that H  l  ne Doyle was responsible for Matilda’s introduction into one of the choicest, yet most formidable little circles of Baltimore society.

CHAPTER IV

BENEDICT: THE ONE BLESSED

*" Ah, fill the Cup: — what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!"*

NOW and then we come across his like in this world of ours; a creature who from his birth seems to move in sublime agreement with God and Nature. Mrs. Travis must have had prescience of her son's fair destiny. She was moved to call him Benedict, which philologically interprets itself into: "One who is blessed of God." From childhood he had been favored beyond the lot of ordinary man. An only son reared by an adoring and tender mother, directed by a strong, upright father, he seemed to have imbibed and concentrated in his small personality all the traits of the gentlemanly stock from which

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he descended. The Travises possessed good blood and the quintessence of grit and honor for generations back. In the history of Baltimore they had figured; some as warriors and conquerors, others as peacemakers and civilizers of men. They owned great tracts of fertile country where they themselves dwelt and furnished a living to hosts of other fellow-men. Their sons, raised in that atmosphere of peace, plenty, and industry — the industry of mind and body — had grown to manhood in that larger life of pure air and undulating meadows; amid the growth and fruitage of the great forces that move the world. — They were, without exception, true and noble sons of the soil.

Benedict Travis drew from this chain of stalwart antecedents his vigorous physique, his healthy mind and sound judgment, all the qualities that won for him the approbation of his fellows. His grandfather had been a scholar — a sort of Jean-Jacques Rousseau — whose sons had naturally followed in way of their predecessor.

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Major Travis had united in his beautiful home, "Willow Brook," all the elements requisite to the perfect up-bringing of his son Benedict. In the great stone mansion, with its vast cool rooms, its wide halls and verandas, its orchards and surrounding gardens, and far beyond him that horizon of fields and meadows where the grain swelled and the cattle grazed beside peaceful streams—young Benedict Travis grew up to manhood.

He loved the place. Though soon impelled from it by his youthful aspirations and ambition, for he looked to the city near by for the realization of all his hopes for the future, he never ceased to yearn for the spot where his first and strongest affections were rooted.

He was a tall, well-built young fellow who walked erect, his head aloft like a young Greek. His eyes of a sapphire blue were set deep beneath his brows. Against his dark hair, they suggested a remote tinge of Irish ancestry. Major Travis, however, always declared that naught but English blood flowed in the Travis veins. There

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might have been an infusion somewhere in the mother's, who was American born.

The boy's first approach to any one was always genial, smiling, and frank. The pressure of his hand immediately set one upon a free-masonry of good-fellowship, and gradually drew one nearer and nearer by those subtle attractions, personality and youth. He was everybody's chum. Men, women, and children alike took him into their confidence, and found him a rare companion.

At college he was popular and at the head of anything that called forth the expenditure of strong physical or mental effort. His professors soon came to observe the wise precaution of never praising him publicly. Secretly they felt for him as for an *enfant gâté* who resisted every temptation to be spoiled. His mind had been charged with the strength and glory of Nature's elemental forces — the living grain, the fragrant hop-vine, the vigor of ripening barley, the strong breezes that blew across the bending harvest to infuse the very life-blood into his young veins. The conquering spirits of the world all come from the

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country, the vast productive country: for in it are health and strength, and beauty and kindness of heart inculcated into its sons by Nature's own graciousness.

From college Benedict aspired to the dignity of the law. In the city he met an old friend of his father, a prominent judge of the Superior Court of Baltimore, who took him into a mild sort of partnership. At first Benedict was all seriousness and enthusiasm in his profession. It was his nature to dive deep or not at all. He would sit among his books and papers hour after hour, day after day, intent upon his determination to achieve success in this as in everything else.

One morning in June when the thermometer had soared beyond its normal limitations, Judge Sanford entered his office and found young Travis literally ensconced in a medley of municipal books and sheets.

"Put up all this stuff and take a spin out upon a country road a morning like this, my boy. The office is stuffy; you need the out-door air."

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"I've been brought up on air," returned Benedict, brightly; "I think I've stored up enough to last me some years. If you don't object, I'll finish up the thing this morning, and beg off for this afternoon."

"What's up?" grinned the judge. "Some social doings, eh? You'll take a high hand at that, if you once get started."

"Just a small informal afternoon at the Doyles'. You know them."

"Yes, yes, you're all right there. How are they all?"

"Pretty well, I think. Mrs. Doyle is cheering up a bit now Hélène is at home for the vacation. They are entertaining a few friends for the first time in a year."

"There's a fine young woman for you!" — the judge was enthusiastic. "I mean Hélène. You ought to see a great deal of her."

"I do. I've frequented their house ever since I first came to Baltimore. Don't you remember, Dr. and Mrs. Doyle used to come out to Willow Brook to spend the Summers? Hélène and I

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played together as children." The young man smiled. "I never had a sure-enough sister, you know, Judge; Hélène, though, fills the place with eminent success."

Judge Sanford regarded him quizzically a moment.

"Sister?" he said meaningly.

But Benedict continued to meet his look, and the judge pursued:

"There are plenty of sisters around that you can pick up for a song, but not many like Hélène Doyle. She's an exceptional young woman. Hold on to her. What are you going to do there this afternoon,—meet some of her numerous friends?"

"I know most of them, the Hadleys and a few others. But it's Miss Dolliver, I think, who is to be the central figure."

"What! The millionaire's daughter?"

"Yes, don't be alarmed"; and Benedict laughed lightly. "I'm proof against money temptations. I'll try to resist them to please

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you and my father," he added with refuting good-nature.

"Then, fire away; I'll put up my money on Hélène if the fight grows hot."

"It's safe to stake your wager on an undisputed fact, like the katy-did," bantered Travis.

The Judge gave him a searching look, and both men fell to the tasks at their respective desks.

To deny that Benedict was pleased with Matilda that afternoon would be to make a wrong assertion. In fact, he was quite struck by her appearance, her freshness, and straightforwardness of thought. He guessed at once the keynote of their sudden congeniality; these two beings who had begun life in God's pure air reflected in their faces the intense joy of living which they found in their now more narrowed existence. He was acquainted with the Atwood girls, Maud and Angela. He was not attracted by them. They were too superficial and artificial; their near presence was stifling.

At the Hadleys' he was enjoyably and domes-

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tically entertained. He spent many hours at their modest home where he installed himself like a relative; solemnly advising Sophie in her impractical ventures and poking mild fun at her; sympathizing with and petting Lucy who bore the burdens of the home and wrestled with the daily problem of living very well on very little. As to Edith who was younger and more in his world, he gratified her by paying due homage to her blonde beauty, listening to her pretty singing, and accompanying her to social functions now and then when she lacked an escort. Altogether they formed a very amicable little coterie.

With Hélène, however, he showed his serious side. Alone with her he was always boyishly candid and open. He talked of his plans for the future; he discussed all sorts of topics of interest to them both, — sociology, religion, ethics, and politics alike. They took endless satisfaction in working a subject threadbare, treating it from every point as if their decision of the matter were a monumental issue to themselves and the country at large. They were on a more equal mental

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level than the others and thus had formed an almost necessary habit of seeing each other often. Truly there existed a rare sympathy between these two handsome, high-bred, young people.

As he told the judge, H  l  ne stood to him more in the relation of a sister than any woman he had ever known. He was just twenty-one and she not quite a year older, but it was not their equality of age as much as their uniformity of mind that had cemented their two natures into an indissoluble friendship. Friendship it was, not yet platonic on either side, for neither of them had ever indulged in the triviality of a love affair. Benedict was, as he had told the judge, safe.

Not many days after he had met Matilda he repaired again to the DoYLES', to talk of her with H  l  ne. She opened the topic by inquiring his opinion.

Travis reflected. "She possesses a strong individuality," he remarked at length. "She has a straightforward manner of pleasing that I like. And then, H  l  ne, in this day and age it is a little unusual to come across a girl so courteous to her

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parents, so thoughtful of their welfare." He was obviously thinking of the disparity between them and Matilda.

"That is one of the traits that I most admire in Matilda," said Hélène. "Do you know what Maupassant says somewhere of women?"

He watched her, interestedly.

"He says," Hélène went on: "'Woman has neither race nor caste. Her charm alone suffices and takes the place of birth and family. Her native *finesse*, her instinctive elegance and subtleness of mind, constitute the only hierarch that can make a woman of the people the equal of great ladies.'"

Travis thoughtfully nodded. "You mean," he said, "that she exemplifies his opinion?"

"It is largely a matter of prejudice," returned Hélène, looking at him with her special smile. "In Matilda's case I will accede to it, but not in many others."

"The exception that proves the rule," Travis observed. "Yes, Miss Dolliver is an exceptional case. Compare her, for example, with —"

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But he did not finish. It was not in his nature to criticise others, impossible if they were ladies. Hélène, however, who could read almost his every thought, who was as familiar with all the details that went to make up his life as she was with her own, supplied the rest.

“You were thinking of the Atwood girls,” she said. His silence was taken for assent, and she proceeded. “I know. But,” with a twinkle, “comparisons are always odious.” She loved to tease him whenever she divined that he was specially interested in some girl.

Both felt that the Atwood girls were heartless in their treatment of their parents, that they were wanting in sense. Atwood *pater* toiled day in and day out for their sole pleasure and comfort. He had grown to be a convenient sort of machine, grinding out the necessary luxuries of life for them with a punctual regularity that caused them to be utterly heedless and selfish. Their demands were insatiable. Instead of showing gratitude, as Miss Dolliver did, they tyrannized

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mercilessly over the poor man, withholding even the meed of some slight show of affection.

“What joy,” asked Benedict, “does Mr. Atwood find in life with his nose ever at the grindstone?”

“Mr. Atwood, fortunately, is endowed with an amiable disposition and that saving trait, a sense of humor. He laughs at the girls’ discontent — and goes on gratifying their extravagant whims.

“There,” Hélène explained, “lies his satisfaction. This question of people educating their children far beyond their own position in life, so that when the children return home, developed, the breach made by their absence places them far ahead of their parents in social or mental progress, is one of the problems of the day. On the wisdom of such a course, we who live in a land of social and moral freedom must refrain from dogmatizing.”

“I’ll grant all that,” said Benedict, in a tone which betrayed that she was not amplifying that phase of the topic which, for the moment, held his interest. “But I want you to agree with me that

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Matilda Dolliver is away ahead of the average girl." He waited with some eagerness for her response, which the girl was quick to note.

"Fie, Benedict," she teased. "It is a mistake to encourage so warm an interest."

"In another girl?" retorted he, matching her bright regard.

"In any girl. Do not forget, young man, that your future is yet to be carved; you are only learning how to handle the tools."

"Am I squelched?" he laughed. "I am. I think, though, you might answer my question without doing me any particular harm. Neither I nor Miss Dolliver is in any immediate danger."

"Well," said Hélène, with an air of gravely considering the matter, "I will admit that Matilda has one or two traits that make her in a way superior to some girls."

"Rubbish!" — scornfully. "You know better!"

The thin, fine lips curved in their mysterious smile. "Yes," she said, seriously now, "Matilda is much superior to the average girl. I have lived

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with her during the better part of a year, and have discovered in her many traits of character that I admire. She is a sweet, lovable girl. Matilda's mother comes from very good stock, but she is timid, retiring, afraid of her husband's and daughter's advancement."

"And there is something pathetic about that," mused the young man. "As the faded mother is standing still, they are marching away from her, leaving her alone. Her eyes only can follow them — wistfully, I fancy."

"That is the inevitable fate that awaits some women," said Hélène. "Mrs. Dolliver's life has been lived in a rut; all her habits of mind and body are fixed; while Mr. Dolliver's life has been one of much variety. Although without any education to speak of, nevertheless he has learned, and is still capable of learning and growing. Matilda realizes this. Quietly, without ostentation, she is trying to improve her father, to impart to him some of her acquired polish and innate refinement of character. As his heart is wrapped up in her, her efforts are bound to produce some

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result. He very gratefully accepts these attempts, striving earnestly to profit by them."

"How fine a thing it is," asserted Travis, "for a girl to protect her parents from ill-natured, malicious tongues. Her patent pride in them is disarming."

"Yes," assented Hélène, "it is very fine — and uncommon."

When he left Hélène Doyle's he came away with the set determination that he would call upon Miss Matilda, as he had been invited to do by her father, at his earliest opportunity. To a young man not especially interested, it would hardly have been necessary to promote the acquaintance, for she and Hélène were constantly together, and he would have ample occasion to meet her at the Doyles'. But he *was* interested and frankly admitted it.

CHAPTER V

BENEDICT PURSUES MISS DOLLIVER'S ACQUAINTANCE.

*"The Grape that can with Logic absolute
The Two-and-seventy Sects confute:
The subtle Alchemist that in a Trice
Life's leaden Metal into Gold transmute."*

DURING the years of Matilda's absence at the Pettingill School, the Dolliver mansion had been subjected to a number of very marked changes. Her fortnightly visits home were largely responsible for the gradual transformation. The Misses Pettingill themselves, ladies of ancient wealth and culture, were cognizant of the very best usages of refined society. They, therefore, conducted their highly esteemed establishment on lines commensurate with their former grandeur. It was their purpose to place their school appointments upon an exact level

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with the homes of their wealthiest patrons, thus to elevate and place upon a certain degree of equality the daughters of those who were not.

Not one detail of the management had escaped Matilda's notice. Her wakened sensibilities were ever on the alert. She wished to extract every advantage from this atmosphere of elegance and culture for which her father was paying generous prices. She would not only imbue herself with its influence, but she would bring it into her father's home and gradually raise herself and her parents to a more congenial level.

The house itself, situated on Charles Street Avenue, could not be improved. Matilda had helped her father make the selection. But its furnishings, alas! swore roisterously at the noble structure.

The testimonial parlor suite was the first to be relegated to some remote part of the great house. A more subdued, refined substitute was installed which pleased Mrs. Dolliver's quiet tastes far better. Ario, with his usual amiability and good-humor, approved and extolled everything sug-

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gested by his daughter. His estimate of her judgment rose with every innovation.

The time soon came when Amanda had to be deposed from her province in the dining-room. A young person of more graceful and slender presence appeared in her stead; a young woman who wore a cap and a voluminous white apron joining at the back with eccentric bows, who never took the liberty of speaking to the family at table, unless addressed; a miracle of deportment excerpted from a class of maids employed by Mrs. Doyle. Hélène and her mother were invited to dine at the Dolliver mansion, and the change had to be effected before their coming.

Mrs. Dolliver had finally consented to the accession of two new maids upon Amanda's frank declaration that "willin' as she was, she could n't be in nineteen places at once and keep her head on." Mrs. Dolliver, too, discovered that the care of a large house exhausted her waning strength. She was growing old, she said, and could n't begin to do the things she used to when Matilda was a baby. Year by year, as the daughter's educa-

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tion progressed, the whole tone of the Dolliver establishment was metamorphosed. Its former atmosphere was entirely abrogated and reached a level consistent with the best homes of the city. Mr. Dolliver, spurred by his daughter's ambitious demands, fanned the fire of his genius, and redoubling his energies, leaped from a mono- to a multi-millionaire's estate. There was nothing too good or too costly for the home that was to be Matilda's when she should at last grace it by her appearance as a strong factor in the social world.

Mrs. Dolliver, who by now had made an unconditional surrender of all her private opinions, moved daily about her magnificent home with a quiet, tremulous, apprehensive look of solicitude. She had grown to say very little. The expression of her own feelings was of so little account. She only looked her wonder, her admiration, when she sat gazing at her two idols. Her words were inadequate.

One day when Matilda was at home upon one of her visits she made this announcement:

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"Father, I think we ought to have a butler."

"A butler?" inquired Mr. Dolliver with a rising desire to accede, but wishing to be circumspect about it. "What *is* a butler?"

"Why, father, you know perfectly well," returned Matilda, conciliatingly. "Don't you remember those people who lived in the big house in Hackerstown, and how their butler used to come for crates of fruit, and how you admired their motor-car he always came in? They were the first in the village to have an automobile."

"I've got one now that's a heap-sight handsomer 'n theirs," chuckled Mr. Dolliver, with irrepressible glee. "Do the Atwoods have a butler?"

"Yes."

"The Del Bondios?"

"I think I heard Hélène say that the Del Bondios had one whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been in the family for generations back."

"Gee whilikins!" exclaimed Mr. Dolliver in surprise. "Guess we can't get one that'll stay



“Father, we ought to have a butler”

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with us as long as that. He'd please your ma mightily, though. She likes folks that come to hire out to stay a long time; that is, if they're the right kind.

"Well, if it's a butler we must have, get one; tell your mother to get one—you get one. Get as many as you like, my dear. I'd like to see how it feels to have a man 'butling' around in my house."

Thus it happened that when Benedict Travis came to make his first call at the great mansion, he found it all that a fastidious young gentleman of the world could desire. The only thing that could have marred the harmony of its artistic interior would have been the presence of its irrevelant proprietor. Mr. Dolliver, according to his custom, was in his down-town office, whither he had repaired shortly after dinner.

That office was his favorite sanctum; the one crucible of his great industrial activities; the place where he felt his keenest and most real enjoyment of life.

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Mrs. Dolliver's mild, delicate presence, smiling and thoughtfully silent, now occupied her spacious drawing-room without a feeling of intrusion. She could have been out of place nowhere. There was always about her the suggestion of a fragile flower nearing dissolution, ready to shake off its trembling petals with the first harsh blast. Beside her frail, slightly stooping figure Matilda rose, the very essence of being, with all the freshness and fairness of youth, vigor, strength, beauty, and gentleness, toward the deciduous mother.

Travis was impressed with the sight as he beheld them together in their home for the first time. In all his acquaintance with young ladies he had never seen such solicitude, such thoughtful consideration for one's mother, except in the case of Hélène Doyle. But Hélène was a rare exception to the modes and ways prevalent among the young women of society.

He was more and more enchanted with what he saw of Matilda. She was affable, but not aggressive. She held herself reservedly aloof

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from those she did not know well. She never made advances when none were proffered. This attitude debarred many from attempting a too close intimacy with her.

With Benedict Travis, however, her reserve only inflamed his desire to be often in her company, to know her character from personal contact with her, rather than through certain observations of H  l  ne Doyle's previously communicated to him. He realized more forcibly that H  l  ne was seldom mistaken in her estimate of people. As he talked with Matilda he felt returning the strong congeniality of their first meeting. A tacit, rather surprising understanding of each other's natures; one of the phases upon which he and H  l  ne had rarely touched—Matilda's bringing up was analogous with his own. Born and reared in that unrestricted, unconventional atmosphere of green meadows, whispering willows, undulating hills, and general moral freedom, added to which was her mental, yet delicately feminine development which raised her to an equal plane with him,

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Benedict found endless delight in discovering the pleasant unity of their ideas.

When he left her that evening, his thoughts were very much engrossed. As he raised his eyes to the starry night, reproaching the gaudy glare of the brilliant avenue, Lorenzo's rapturous words came to him:

"‘On such a night’"—but he checked himself and finished the citation with his own words, "one could write poetry and enjoy it." He laughed aloud at his own exaltation. Then reasoning with himself:

"It is really quite absurd how the mere contact with an attractive young woman who agrees with a fellow on every point, will send him dancing off to Olympus without the slightest preparation! Well, I've promised to spend tomorrow evening at the Hadleys'; that will sober me back to the humdrum of mundane affairs," he added, as he ascended the steps of his apartment hotel and nodded genially to the elevator boy.

CHAPTER VI

THE HADLEYS AT HOME

*“With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap’d —
‘I came like Water, and like Wind I go.’”*

NOT far from the Doyles' residence, on Park Avenue, was the Hadley home; a rather pretentious name for so small a street where the houses could hardly be called residences. Yet the Hadley girls were glad to give their address to their most intimate friends; glad that it was, at least, an avenue, and not a half-street with an ignominious name like "Gooseberry Lane" or "Pigeon Cove Road," as Sophie explained to a well-meaning neighbor who came to offer her assistance in helping them secure a reliable milk-man the day after they had moved in.

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"It's a comfort to have kindly disposed people in the vicinity. We've always been used to a large house; but now that we're alone, — no man in the family since father's death, — we've got to get along in this little rabbit-hutch and make the best of it!"

"What did your father die of?" asked the neighbor, by way of showing interest.

"Big tobacco deal — loss of money — nervous break-down — broken heart," enumerated the eldest Miss Hadley, striking each of these calamities off on her fingers in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"He must have been still a young man," was the next remark of sympathy.

"Oh, mercy, no! I'm past thirty-five and Lu is past thirty. Edith is the only young thing in our family. She draws the butterflies. There's always some young man dancing her attendance. Father was nearly seventy when he died."

"Your sister Edith is real pretty — she has

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such lovely hair. I saw her coming in this morning with her arms full of bundles."

"She'd been to market; we haven't fished out the market basket from the *débris*; so many things get lost when one moves. She came back with her purse empty. When I asked her why she'd spent all her money, she answered, 'I did it purposely, I wanted to create a vacuum.'"

"She must be real clever and witty," said the visitor, quite impressed.

"You see," Sophie went on, "we have a tradition in our family; it's that when any one of us is hard up and spends every last cent she's got, as sure as fate, money drops down from somewhere. Aunt Mary sends us a box of Cousin Harriette's old fineries or a check for some one's birthday, or Edith gets a new piano pupil who pays by the lesson, or Lucy has an order for a batch of home-made mince-meat or English plum-pudding—it never fails. I'm the only one that never succeeds in bagging anything. I've tried to write stories for the

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magazines; they all come back—some with thanks, and some without. I do a lot of literary work. I'm busy now with an article, very deep subject, 'The Influence of Heredity *versus* Environment.' I'd like to sell it, but if I don't I'll patch it up for the Woman's Club. *They* like my things, anyway."

Sophie rattled on in this manner without interruption, hardly pausing to take breath.

Although a Pettingill graduate of some sixteen or seventeen years back, she had fallen into a masculine way of using slang and happy-go-lucky phrases, much to the chagrin of the two other sisters who felt that, in spite of their reverses, they were still "ladies."

The friendly neighbor was not tired though she had been standing all the while; for the tied-up chairs were not "get-at-able," Sophie said. Miss Sophie was so entertaining—But at this juncture the door opened and Edith excused herself by saying,

"I am sorry to disturb you, Sophie, but the paper-hangers are here to renovate your room."

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The visitor left promptly, promising to call again and inviting Sophie to "come over."

"You all come over," she repeated kindly, as Edith closed the door very quietly, and immediately turned upon Sophie:

"I hope you are satisfied, now you've told our whole family history to that woman," said Edith, with asperity. "If you have nothing else to tell her, would you mind helping me untie that roll of carpet?"

"You needn't be so smart, Miss Snippy," Sophie returned without the least show of resentment. "If I did n't talk I would n't say anything, would I? I talked about our affairs because I need to — to get inspiration for my work."

"Oh, that's the way you get inspiration, is it?" Edith studied her elder sister's placid visage. "Perhaps you'd like to go and spend the rest of the morning with her; I wish you would."

"No, I should n't," said Sophie, who was befagged by Edith's sarcastic remarks.

"Come, come, girls," called Lucy. "Don't stand there bickering when there is so much to

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do to get the house settled. Cannot one of you 'phone for a man to help open and unpack this barrel of china?"

"Where are those miserable paper-hangers, and what do they want of me?" wailed poor Sophie, looking around her in dismay.

"They want you to read them your last poem on 'The Cruelty of Love Unrequited,'" and the three girls separated with a laugh.

Misnamed Sophie had her trials, though her sisters never gave her credit for anything but being "funny" and affording them and their friends inexhaustible amusement.

She often wondered why she had been named Sophie, that appellation of wisdom. "Oh, the irony of nomenclature! I'm not a Minerva," was her familiar complaint. "I don't see why people use so little foresight in naming children. When they behold their first-born — innocent, squirming thing! — they immediately think it is going to be either the future president or his first lady, and they invariably strike it wrong.

"Now, I came into the world with absolutely

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no qualifications; no beauty, no fortune, no wit, no wisdom. For we were not rich when I was born. Mother had a small legacy which, as usual, she let father take to put in some big investment. Father was always visionary and high-falutin' in his ideas. At first he succeeded phenomenally. By the time Edith was born we were very well off indeed. Mother sailed around in her own carriages, like the other grandees. I remember, when I saw her dressed up to kill to go out in company, I used to think she was the grandest of 'dees.'"

"For a while everything went as fine as a fiddle. Lu and I were sent to Pettingill Seminary, each four years successively. Then, k'flump! came that villainous tobacco deal and father lost everything but his life insurance. It was just about time for Edith's education to begin and mother wouldn't hear of her darling's going to public school. She'd take boarders rather than subject her precious, delicate darling to such humiliation. The Miss Pettingills came to call and found mother in tears over her

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dilemma. No doubt the Miss Pettingills remembered remorsefully the heaps and heaps of money they'd already got from us, so they turned magnanimous and told mother not to worry, Edith should enter Pettingill School in the Fall, concessionally. The child has been a favorite there with every one these three years. Mother was so grateful that she'd bake and knit and bake the whole time to send them things. I really think she killed herself knitting and baking. I wish you could see the shawls and afghans, and the pies and volovangs. Of course, we were all glad that Edith was to have the same advantages that we'd had. They gave her music lessons — both kinds — and brought out her voice wonderfully. Now, she makes more at giving little girls piano lessons in a week than Lu and I do in a month. She will be graduated next year with Matilda Dolliver and the others. Matilda thinks she ought to do wonders with her voice, and she's promised to help her."

In this wise Sophie entertained whomsoever

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she could with the "family secrets." The two younger girls reproved and implored her to guard her tongue, but all in vain. Sophie would agree with them that it was not necessary to publish all one's private affairs; promised to be discreet, and would resume at the first opportunity.

However, the Hadley girls were well thought of, not only in their present locality but among those who had previously been their friends. Every one seemed to overlook Sophie's singularities, and made due allowances. For in spite of her one unruly member she was, as Matilda had said, droll and strikingly unique. Kind and generous-hearted, but brainless as the traditional March Hare, she spent her life repairing by her goodness the havoc wrought by her thoughtlessness.

It was here in this dove-cote of simplicity and domesticity that Benedict liked to come to shake off the shackles of a too rigid conventionalism. At Mrs. Doyle's, life, conversation, and entertainment were more or less ceremonial.

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There was never the atmosphere of free expansion which he found at the Hadleys'. He bantered with Sophie upon all sorts of subjects. The eldest Hadley girl could not carry on a serious discussion upon any topic. She was too much of a *caquetteuse*; not enough of a thinker. He would make some startling declaration just to get her "rattled," as he expressed it, and she would try to argue with him; but his sound premises, his logical reasoning, the strong flowing words that made him a good lawyer would demolish all her poor casuistry. Then feeling herself worsted, she would shake her finger at him roguishly:

"I'll have a talk with you again about that some day and convince you." And Benedict would cheerfully accept the challenge; but that "some day" of Sophie's was already lost in the misty future of impossibilities.

He enjoyed the Hadleys' home because he found there entertainment and satisfaction to please every phase of his nature. Sophie amused him. Lucy afforded him an outlet for his boyish

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sympathies. He would follow her around the house from kitchen to garret when she was confiding to him her troubles or anything of special interest about their domestic affairs. This was a strikingly new side of life to him. In his own home, where ease and plenty abounded, he had never heard of the perplexities of having to *tirer la ficelle*, — as the French have it, — to make ends meet. He had evinced so much interest that Lucy had fallen into the way of asking his advice about every momentous question that came into their simple lives. He had known them, through Hélène Doyle, since his earliest college days. That was about the time Mr. Hadley had lost his money. They struggled hard to keep up appearances as long as their mother lived; but when she, too, left them, they began to think of curtailing their expenses.

It was Benedict Travis, boy as he was, who had counselled them to make the change from their ruinous, large mansion to the humbler home on Park Avenue. In spite of their reduced circumstances, the Hadley girls retained their

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place in Baltimore society. They were invited to all large functions, although they were not in a position to return such civilities. The girls truly believed that it was through Benedict's and H  l  ne's continued loyalty and friendship that they had not been totally ostracized from the social world. But it was not. The Hadley girls were women of refined and cultured habits. Edith and Lucy, and even Sophie, when she set her mind to it, were fitted to mingle with the best society the city afforded—that city which has retained to-day its high ideal of what constitutes real culture. Edith was especially sensitive to all that was artistic and beautiful. Her charming voice, her pleasing personality, secured for her a permanent place in all small gatherings as well as great. Their own informal entertainments to their intimate friends were always pronounced most enjoyable.

They had retained from their former house of wealth and grandeur, such things as gave their modest home an air of culture and artistic refinement. Benedict used to say he would rather

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spend an hour at the Hadleys' than a whole evening at some of the houses where pomp and glitter were displayed, and satiating banquets, served where no true spirit of cordiality or hospitality prevailed.

It was now three years since the Hadleys had moved and were comfortably settled in what Sophie was pleased to call their "rabbit-hutch," when Benedict remembered his promise to them, that night returning from his first call upon Matilda Dolliver. They had invited him and others of their coterie to an old-fashioned "tea" and bridge, a game to which Sophie was especially partial. The rest of the company enjoyed it too, because it gave her such a fine opportunity to discuss points when she chanced to become Benedict's partner in the course of the games.

"He goes for me as if I were a pickpocket when I happen to make a wrong play," she said, as they all sat around the tables; "but I don't mind being sat upon, if I can only learn to play a good game."

"That is one of Sophie's extravagant meta-

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phors," condoned Lucy. "Benedict is never so discourteous as she makes him out to be."

"I don't mind being abused by Sophie," he replied with a screened look at the offender. "I rather enjoy it."

It was quite evident that Benedict enjoyed everything when he was among that charmed circle, for Hélène and Mrs. Doyle were there, lending dignity and propriety to the event. Matilda Dolliver was at his left, dividing her attention between her mother and himself, radiating as she always did, for him, the glorious effulgence of young womanhood. Her very presence made his mind tingle, but he repressed his desire to be too much elated out of consideration for others. They went on bantering, exchanging witticisms with one another, and were just finishing supper when every one's attention was arrested by the sound of heavy wheels halting before their door.

"Oh!" cried Sophie, in a fever of excitement. "It's the express wagon!"

Anything so unusual in the quiet street as that

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lumbering, imposing vehicle, caused a thrill of expectant joy in the hearts of the Hadley girls when it stopped anywhere near the cottage.

“There goes the door-bell!”

“I’ll go,” cried Benedict, wishing to share the fun.

“Tell him to bring it to the back door. It’s a barrel!” directed Lucy who had run to the window.

Young Travis made strides from one entrance to the other, arriving just in time to hand a generous fee to the expressman.

“It is Aunt Mary’s annual donation,” announced Edith who was unconcernedly dawdling with her berries beside Dr. Rasburn. “I suppose we must go and inspect the contents.”

“It’s like a missionary box to the heathen,” exclaimed Sophie with delight, “and just the thing to have you two men here to open it.”

“My stars, what luck!” cried Benedict. “Come and fall to, you Rasburn; we’ll have the thing done in a jiffy.”

The two young fellows pulled off their coats

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and went to work. By this time, the invading company filled the small rear rooms and watched operations with interest. Every one wore an exulting smile, like children surrounding a Christmas tree.

"The first 'bags I' belongs to you and me, doctor," jollied Benedict. He pulled away the top paper and his hand lighted on two huge boxes of French bonbons.

"That's right," chimed Dr. Rasburn. "I've prohibited all kinds of sweets to my patients," trying to stuff the box in a trousers pocket.

"Treasures untold!" from the enraptured Sophie who was pulling attractive-looking bundles from the barrel.

In the meantime Lucy and Edith were clearing off the table in the dining-room so as to prepare a place on which to display the barrel's treasures.

"Oh, dear me!" Sophie wailed, her nervous fingers dropping each package as fast as it was picked up. "I'm so confused! It's just like getting ready to have a wedding," and when

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everybody laughed, — “ I ’m sure there ’s nothing funny about it,” she rebuked them.

“ It ’s up to you to have the first. You ’re the oldest,” called out Edith from the dining-room.

“ I am, but it ’s not very sisterly to remind me of it so often. *Phew!* I ’m all out of breath!”

“ I ’ll see if I can’t fish out of here a new dress-suit for the occasion,” added Benedict. “ You sit down, Sophie, till you get your second wind.”

By this time the entire company had broken into a burst of rippling merriment. Mrs. Dolliver was pleasantly reminded of her own enthusiasm at such surprising joys in younger days. Matilda laughed aloud at Benedict’s hearty enjoyment of the whole affair. H  l  ne’s invincible smile reflected its radiance as the young moon sheds its soft light on the woes and joys of mortals here below.

Later, they played a poor, rather unsatisfactory game of bridge. The Hadley girls’ minds were continually reverting to the unlimited possibilities of the barrel’s contents.

“ My!” suddenly exclaimed poor Sophie in

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genuine dismay. "Wasn't that the proper play? Then we've lost the rubber!" Her countenance wore such a distressed look that the disaster was forgotten.

"Benedict, I know you'll never want to play with me again. And I can't for the life of me see what you girls are laughing at."

"Yes, indeed, I will," consoled Benedict. "I would take pleasure in being beaten almost any time, just for another sight of the expression on your face. Somebody bring a hand-glass; let Sophie laugh too."

"You knave of hearts! But I was thinking of — of —"

"Not of me," he said with a despairing look.

"No, of that dress-suit you didn't fish out of the barrel. So I suppose the wedding must be postponed."

The party broke up with endless expressions of delight; they had all experienced such a good time. But it was always thus at the Hadleys'. Their inner lives were free and open as the day. Even Edith who had long cherished a secret

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desire to be like H  l  ne Doyle, placid, reserved, undemonstrative of her inmost feelings, had succumbed to the contagious spirit of the afternoon. Taking into consideration the pleasure she had had with her friends, together with the barrel surprise from Minnesota, her adamant resolutions were quite mollified. She took her elder sister's face between her hands:

"Oh, Sophie, you dear, incorrigible goose!" she said vehemently. "I wish some one would come along and marry you, and take you off to — to Alaska!"

"Gracious goodness!" Sophia exploded in consternation. She invariably accepted the most absurd suggestion with utmost seriousness. "What would I do in Alaska? Talk to the Eskimos who would n't understand a word I said? Besides, I have n't any suitable clothing. No, thank you, Missy, you've got several wishes more coming to you."

The three girls laughingly parted for the night, feeling, on the whole, very well satisfied with the result of their "tea-party."

CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNG LADY GRADUATES ARE LAUNCHED UPON THE SOCIAL SEA

*"Before the Phantom of False Morning died,
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,
'When all the Temple is prepared within,
Why nods the drowsy Worshipper outside?'"*

IT was the Summer after their graduation; the young ladies of Pettingill School had flown hither and yon from the city to havens of diversion and rest after the strenuous labors that culminated in their final triumph. Every one left Baltimore in June. Even Hélène Doyle and her mother departed for some quiet sea-port near by, as Mrs. Doyle could not bear the suffocation of the city. The only ones among the graduates who did not leave were Edith Hadley and Matilda Dolliver; the first because she could not, owing to financial re-

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straint, the second because she had not yet acquired the habit. She was well satisfied to remain at home; the home that had been so munificently embellished for her permanent reception.

Among the recent acquisitions of the Dolliver mansion was a new parlor-grand piano, Matilda's graduating present. It was constructed upon the most symmetrically graceful Louis XV model. Its surface was completely covered with a satin finish of gold-leaf, giving it an appearance of extreme elegance and splendor, surrounded as it was by a multitude of chaste artistic objects.

Matilda, in her four years of school, had grown to be an adept at playing the beautiful instrument. And it was one of her father's chief compensations to see his daughter sitting before it, at evening, extracting rare, sweet sounds that stirred his burly nature to depths he had never known. Mrs. Dolliver usually sat near him to listen, and expressed her sensitiveness only by the tears trembling upon her

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lashes. When the strains were most touching he would lean comfortingly toward her and whisper:

“It affects me kind of queer-like, too, mom-mee,” and put his fine linen handkerchief to her eyes.

Dolliver had learned to respect his wife's more delicate organism. He no longer chided her for showing her emotions. He realized that she had grown, with Matilda, more fine, more dainty, more suitably Matilda's mother. He glowed inwardly when he stopped to realize the fact: “I have made it possible for them to be like this!”

The thought of his own abnormality never entered his mind. They were satisfied with him; that was enough; he was satisfied with himself. Egotism was not a component part of Ario Dolliver's nature. He lacked in many ways, but not through selfishness. The pure ego was with him entirely out of the game. It was his power to act and do for others that impelled him to every venture.

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Through the long summer days that followed, Benedict Travis found it refreshing and invigorating to spend a few hours now and then at the Charles Street Avenue mansion. He was very much engrossed with a difficult case placed in his hands by the judge, who was beginning to shirk hard work. Benedict, like Matilda, had not formed the "vacation habit." He found rest and refreshment in her companionship. Sometimes he came with Edith Hadley and they had charming musical evenings; or he accompanied Matilda and her mother on short motoring tours,—ample opportunities, these, for promoting friendly relations.

While they were on one of these pleasure trips, one sultry afternoon in late August, Mr. Dolliver was at his down-town office, heedless of the sweltering atmosphere and of his clerks' fagged-out expressions of weariness. A knock at his private office caused him to raise his eyes to the intruder.

"And now, what, Percy?" he demanded with unruffled countenance.

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"If you please, sir, there's a young man here that insists on seeing you."

"What sort of a fellow is he?" was the next inquiry from Mr. Dolliver who remained unperturbed.

"Why, a nice enough looking chap. He says he's a college man and selling some sort of a concern to help him pay his way for next year."

"Trot in your customer," and Mr. Dolliver moved away from his papers and leaned back in his swinging chair.

A bright-looking youth promptly stepped in.

"Good-day, sir, I don't wish to take up too much of your valuable time, but I'd like to talk with you about an attachment that perhaps would interest you."

"Very well. Say what you have to say as briefly as possible. I can"—with a glance at his watch—"give you just five minutes."

"Thank you, I trust I shall convince you the period is not wasted. It will not be if I can interest you in this remarkable attachment, the greatest development of the age."

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Mr. Dolliver eyed him with such a curious look of severity and merriment combined that the youth's enthusiasm was checked for an instant. Mr. Dolliver was repeating quizzically:

"An attachment—attachment?"

"You may not understand just what I mean," the boy hastened to explain.

"Yes, I do. I know the meaning of 'attachment.' I have a couple of very strong attachments at my house up-town. Don't guess I want any more at my time of life."

"But not like the one I'd like to sell you," the boy was trying to wedge in. "I hear you've recently purchased a costly instrument; with my attachment you can enjoy the finest music without any one's taking the trouble to touch the keys. It's a self-playing arrangement."

"Young fellow," began Mr. Dolliver, getting warmed up to the point of eloquence, "you've got a good deal of sand to come to this here beehive of industry and expect me to talk with you about an 'attachment,' when I've already got one! My daughter is the only at-

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achment I want to see at that 'costly instrument.' Man, I've spent a good-sized fortune educating that daughter to every degree of perfection, piano-playing included. You come and want me to buy an attachment. Gosh!"

"But, sir," pursued the enterprising young agent, "you'll be having an introductory affair for your daughter next Winter —"

Mr. Dolliver's interest was aroused.

"What's that?" he sharply interrupted.

"You'll be having an introductory affair for your daughter," the young man repeated, "and at such an occasion you can't depend on her for the music. She'll be standing in the reception line."

"How do you know I'm going to have one?" demanded Mr. Dolliver.

"Because, sir, all the best families do; and I supposed, of course, you would."

"You supposed wrong if you supposed that when I have a coming out party for my daughter I'll have an old attachment piano-playing machine!"

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"It's not old, sir, it's the newest thing out in the line of musical instruments."

"I don't doubt your word. But when I give an introductory affair, I'm going to have an orchestra, I am, the best in the city." Mr. Dolliver paused a moment to reflect upon the possibilities which had all at once been opened up in his mind. "Introductory affair," he presently mused aloud—"attachment, Humph!"

Mr. Dolliver was evidently very firm in his decision. The young man looked crestfallen and took up his hat to go.

"I'm sorry to have troubled you, sir; good-afternoon."

"Stop a bit!" said Mr. Dolliver as the youth was nearing the door. "I'm inclined to believe that the five minutes were wasted. I can afford to lose them better than you." He pulled out his book and wrote a check. "Here, take this and buy an attachment for yourself, your sweetheart, your grandmother, anybody who *wants* one! I don't."

The young fellow, doubtful, wondering,

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walked back hesitatingly to receive the check. He did not look at it until he had said, "You are very kind indeed, sir, and I thank you."

He went out as promptly as he had come in. But Percy, the office boy, wondered what Mr. Dolliver had done to make his visitor so suddenly happy.

When Mr. Dolliver returned to the bosom of his family that evening he told them the story of the young man with the "attachment." Matilda and her mother were much amused by his account of the interview.

"But I sent him off grinning all over," he added, and they easily guessed what had happened.

"And now, what's all this about giving coming out parties for young ladies that have just been graduated?" he inquired, touching upon the cue given by the agent, which had prompted the generous check. Mr. Dolliver liked to be enlightened without his ignorance being revealed, and he was ever ready to pay handsomely for such suggestions.

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"It is quite the custom in families where the daughters are apt to go out much into society," exclaimed Matilda. "But it will not be necessary for you to do it, father, unless you want to. We know so few people."

"I do want to," he warmly insisted. "We don't have to be such sticklers in regard to a big thing like that. We'll ask everybody and make no hard feelings anywhere."

"We would better not give the first," suggested Matilda, fearing her father might wish to make the venture. "In a month or two, invitations will begin to arrive. It would be nice to wait until one or two receptions have been given."

"I don't mind waiting," said he. "Your idea, Tildy, of waiting to see how other folks do it is right, as usual. But the affair, *I'm* going to give has got to be a splendiferous blow-out! The best caterers, best musicians, best of everything the city can offer. James, our butler here, says he knows just how the thing ought to be done. I'm going to let him have his own

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way in all except one thing—no liquors; no champagne. I'm not going to let any respectable young fellows go from my house drunk! Fruit punch colored with grape juice galore, but nothing stronger; that's all they'll have to drink. O.K., is it?"

"Most certainly, it is, father; mother and I shouldn't think of wanting anything of which you disapproved. We shall be satisfied with whatever plans you make, won't we, mother?"

"Surely, my dear, surely," replied the gentle Mrs. Dolliver, who seldom raised a dissenting voice.

"Then that's another thing settled," and Ario took up his evening paper.

The first October days opened with a whirl of social excitement. Invitations arrived for two introductory receptions a week apart. Mr. Dolliver was enchanted. At the dinner table that same evening he issued this proclamation:

"One coming out party for October the twenty-eighth, another for November the fourth. We'll have the third one! James," addressing

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the butler, "it's up to you for the feast, illuminations, the flowers, everything that's wanted. Ladies," turning to his wife and daughter, "you will attend to the invitations no later than tomorrow, and also to your toilettes. I will see to the orchestra and — the bills!" At which he laughed heartily to evince the great satisfaction he took in doing so.

The Dolliver affair was one of the great social events of that Winter. According to Mr. Dolliver's wish, they had invited "everybody," and judging from the long file of elegant motor-cars, limousines, and handsomely groomed equipages that extended up and down the avenue, everybody had accepted.

Ario Dolliver had chosen a most propitious time, the latter part of November, when the social life of any large city is just newly awakened from its somnolent Summer, and ready to enjoy itself with keen enthusiasm. It was a magnificent and dignified social function where entertainment was provided for all. The house was brilliantly illuminated from the vast reception-rooms below

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to the dancing hall above, where the famous orchestra played. A ceaseless procession of richly attired guests passed up and down the broad stairways whose railings were entwined with garlands of sweetly scented blossoms.

“The gods are with him in all he undertakes!” exclaimed Benedict, as he stepped out upon one of the wide verandas to breath the cool air, and beheld a full November moon flooding the gardens below.

He had come with the two elder Hadley sisters, Edith being escorted by Dr. Rasburn, Héléne Doyle and her mother, by an old friend of her father’s, visiting them at the time. So he had made a martyr of himself, as Edith said, and was playing the gallant to her elder sisters.

He was promenading with Lucy, but talking of Matilda. Mrs. Doyle and Héléne who, with Edith Hadley, had been in the reception line, he had run across several times. But with Matilda, Benedict had not yet had a chance to talk, although the line had been broken an hour or two before.

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She was, of course, the centre of attraction. Simply but exquisitely gowned, he thought he had never seen her look so well. Surrounded by such a multitude, it was difficult to have access to one in such demand. He had made the effort repeatedly, but unsuccessfully. Finally, as Edith and Rasburn were on their way to the ball-room, he caught sight of her going in the same direction on some one else's arm.

"There," he said to himself, "I ought to have been there to get the first dance!" and he accelerated his steps. Once in the ball-room his opportunities were larger. He danced once around with Edith, then busied himself securing partners for her and Rasburn, after which he made a straight cut for the place where Matilda and her escort were sitting. She greeted him with a smile and held out her hand.

"Where have you been all the evening? I have n't once seen you."

"Trying to get to your side and — failing," he replied, smiling. "Let me have your card, if you please. You are not going to let this duffer

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fill up your whole programme — anyhow, not as long as I can write my name.” The duffer protested; but Travis had his way.

“No, indeed,” said the fair *débutante*. “I will reserve one or two for you.”

“This next schottish then? I like the Caledonian movement,” he went on, coolly striking off three or four more numbers.

“That is altogether too many,” she objected, examining her card. “How can you spare so many dances from your legation of — of sisters? Where are the Hadleys, and Hélène?”

“Edith is over yonder with Dr. Rasburn, but flirting with the Grey boys. Look! Observe how the scowl with which they regard one another changes to a fatuous grin when they turn to her. . . . Hélène is still down-stairs with her mother and an old friend of her father’s — a poetic theologian with whom Sophie is having the time of her life. And” — looking intently into her eyes — “I am here.”

Matilda’s lids fluttered and drooped, the color rose in her cheeks. “Where is Lucy?” she asked.

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"I left her with them; she seemed to be enjoying herself."

"Truant!"

"I wanted to be with you. A fellow can't be expected to devote *all* his time to his — sisters."

Matilda's laugh erased her temporary discomposure; she laughed, not especially at what he had said, but from sheer abundance of happiness. His ardor was too ridiculous at such a time.

"Hélène should be up here," said the girl. "I love to see her dance or stand or — oh, do anything. She always makes me think of a Corinthian column standing silent in the pallid light of a midnight moon."

"Manifestly," Travis laughed, "she is an inspiration to poetic flights. But she is not dancing this evening; she seems preoccupied with her mother."

The music was striking up once more. "This is our dance," he reminded her in a whisper. Taking her hand into his without giving her an opportunity to reply, they went flitting over the polished floor, as light as thistle-down. Many

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eyes watched them; many voices commented upon their fine appearance together. When the schottish was ended, Matilda said to him,

“Try to gather our crowd so that we may all go to supper together. It will be such fun!”

“This is all the fun I want,” declared Travis, guiding her slowly toward their seats.

Her eyes flashed him a swift look of inquiry, and dropped before his ardent gaze.

“It’s a pleasure that will soon pall,” she laughed nervously. “Besides, I must distribute the favors of my card, Mr. Travis.”

“Not too lavishly,” he promptly objected. He was not inclined to give her up just yet. “Anyhow, we have two more numbers before supper.”

“Yes,” she acquiesced, nodding archly to him as she floated away with another cavalier.

Glowing in his exaltation, Benedict crossed the ball-room, instinctively dodging the whirling couples of whom he was for the time being oblivious. Presently he sought Edith, but she, too, had flown away, — with Rasburn, an eager

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waltzer. He leaned back in his chair, glad of the chance to muse a while; but seeing him alone Edith came over to say,

“What, not exhausted so soon!” in mock wonder.

“Not a bit of it.”

“Then, why are you not dancing? You look contented—happy. There are a number of unengaged damsels across the way.”

“I would rather wait for you,” he returned.

“So sweet of you,” laughed Edith, composedly.

“Only two more waltzes after this, mind, then the banquet. Make the most of them.”

“But you are engaged to Matilda for those,” she flashed at him, and danced off again.

“Why add the ‘for those’?” he asked himself, smiling. “Engaged! I wish I were!”

Another waltz, and he is gliding around with Matilda in his arms. Again the fascination of it seems to demand an endless protraction of the pleasure that stops all too soon. He leaves her, now, to await the next climax. He circles the

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hall twice with Edith, but it is not the same. He watches her as they pass each other now and then, and feels that he can never enjoy dancing with any other woman.

At length the last waltz tunes up. He has worked himself into a perfect fever of desire. He crosses the hall to claim her; but she is coming toward him with Angela Atwood.

"Mr. Travis, I must beg you to excuse me for this number," she says, with no sign of regret. "I must go into the conservatory with Angela. I will join you later at the supper table."

Travis does not like this at all; the light in his face immediately gives away to gloom. He has always entertained a dislike for the Atwood girls. Why should one of them come now to cross his pleasure?

"D——!" The expletive is clipped off between his set teeth, which come savagely together.

But he conquers a feeling so foreign to his nature, and gratifies Edith by dancing the last waltz with her. As soon as it is over, he hastens to the supper room. He wishes to lose no time

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in getting the clique together. *He* will keep his promise to Matilda. He seeks Hélène and Mrs. Doyle. They are still in the company of the Hadley girls. Sophie is discoursing volubly to the mature theologian. Hélène notes the anxious, searching look in Benedict's eyes; he is not like his own free, happy self.

She rose and came to him, and he felt the relief of her nearness.

"Are we going now?" she asked.

"No, no; I came down to wait for Matilda. She wants us all to go to supper together."

"Where is she now?"

"She has gone to the conservatory with Angela Atwood." His tone revealed the desertion, and Hélène's smile taunted him.

The party that were there followed him to the dining-room. He wished to secure a place from which he could observe the conservatory door. He wanted to draw Matilda into their circle and exclude the Atwood element, if possible.

In the ball-room Angela Atwood had suffered a mishap. Some one had stepped upon the train

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of her gown, and she had appealed to Matilda. The latter felt it incumbent upon her to assist in repairing the damage. She supplied herself from her room with the necessities, and the two young women betook themselves to the now deserted conservatory to adjust matters. While there they fell into a conversation, greatly aggravating Benedict's watchful expectancy.

"I am so very glad of this occasion to tell you, Matilda, how pleased we all are with your reception. It is a glorious success!"

"I am happy to know you approve of it," returned the young hostess with a gracious smile, as she gathered up the tattered shreds of her guest's train and fastened them together.

"I suppose it is all your planning? It does you credit."

"Not at all," corrected Matilda. "Father planned and managed the whole affair."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; my father, you know, excels in carrying out successfully what he undertakes."

"Well, he has certainly succeeded in this.

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But, my dear, I want to confide something to you. It is for the present a secret!" Angela lowered her voice and came very near Matilda. "Maud and I are giving our introductory reception next month, shortly before Christmas, and we are to have a young French nobleman; the Duc de Beauchamps, who arrives in December to pass the holidays with the Del Bondios. They are distantly related, you know."

Angela paused to note the effect of this announcement. She thought: "This must surely abase the Dolliver lustre to mere mediocrity."

"That is charming!" said Matilda, genuinely pleased. "A real French nobleman!"

The toilet was, by this time, in order, and they both came out of the conservatory. Benedict went forward and the young ladies separated; Matilda to join the party at the supper table, Angela to the ball-room to finish her dance, and thinking to herself all the while: "I wonder if you will meet him. Not if Maud and Mother can prevent it!"

The festivities were lasting into the small hours

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of morning. No one seemed disposed to break the sociability of the banqueting table. Here the disgruntled Benedict quite recovered his equanimity of spirit. He talked incessantly to Matilda, as if making up for time lost. He made inroads into the delicacies and declared he had never tasted such good punch. He was in an exhilaration of heart and mind which showed no sign of desisting.

At three o'clock, Mrs. Doyle and the older members of their party began to fear that day-break would surprise them. They dispersed to the various dressing rooms, and were soon re-assembled in the lower hall. Benedict was again talking to Matilda. She followed them, listening and smiling, as far as the entrance landing. As she stood there beneath the lights, bowing her adieux to these, her chosen friends, there were others besides Benedict who felt that they were taking away in their memory the picture of a gracious, adorable woman.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HADLEYS ALSO ANTICIPATE

*“ And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before,
The Tavern shouted — ‘ Open now the door!
You know how little while we have to stay,
And, once departed, may return no more.’ ”*

A WEEK later the Dolliver family received cards to the Atwood ball. Matilda exhaled a long sigh of relief and exultation when hers was brought to her. Since her conversation with Angela she had experienced a slight feeling of disquiet which, however, her better judgment persistently dispelled. The arrival of the card restored to her that well-poised attitude of assurance which had placed her at the head of all the young *débutantes*.

Mr. Dolliver was exceedingly gratified.

“ Looky here, Emmy, here’s ours. ‘ Mr. and Mrs. Ario Emerson Dolliver.’ Don’t that look

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grand? I tell you what, Mrs. D., you're something of a *débutante* yourself. Right in the swim, going to parties and balls, just like the young folks." Mr. Dolliver beamed, as he summed it up by adding, "And it's all Matildy's doings."

"Not entirely mine, father," said the dutiful daughter. "You are too modest. You forget that you are the prime factor in every success I may have achieved."

"But 'twas you that dropped the first hint," combatted her father, with inflating satisfaction.

"You would have come to it in time. I only hastened the consummation."

Mrs. Dolliver's eyes were glistening; her whole face expressed the pride and joy she felt at Matilda's approbation of her father.

"You are right, daughter, we owe everything to him."

Mr. Dolliver broke into a hearty laugh.

"What more do you women folks want? A new gown for the coming ball? Jewels? Anything to fill your heart's desire?"

"Since you propose it, father," Matilda

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laughed, "I think I would like a new gown for the occasion. The Atwoods entertain so very largely. There will be some great people at their ball."

"Why, sure," agreed Mr. Dolliver, perfectly elated at the suggestion. "That gown you wore to our reception was mighty neat and becoming; but it was still a school-girl's dress. You must have a ball-room costume, and a necklace: I'll 'tend to the latter. I want you to be the queen — not of the huckleberry-bush, as I used to tell your ma she was, but the queen of the ball!"

Matilda had kept Angela's secret. She had not revealed the fact to her father that a young duke was to be present. But she had inwardly determined to attire herself in chaste but regal splendor. Her father's offer of a necklace was most welcome. Thus equipped she thought she might venture to meet the Duc de Beauchamps.

When Mr. Dolliver's selection came home a few days later, it was a beautiful stream of diamonds. Matilda's face glowed with pleasure.

"Try it on, Matildy, see how you look in it,"

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urged her father, as he fastened the brilliant gems around her neck. "My! but you do look stunning in 'em. There's nothing like genuine diamonds to set off a lady's toilette, by Gum! Your eyes shine just like 'em now. Only *they* are black diamonds!"

Mrs. Dolliver was thoughtfully contemplating her daughter.

"If it is going to be such a tremendous affair," she said, tremulously, "I think I won't try to go, Matilda. It makes my eyes blur, and my heart beat so. I would rather stay home and think how it's all going to be while I sit up for you."

Matilda came near her mother.

"Do not feel that you must go to all these assemblies, mother dear; I do not wish my life of gaiety to weary you."

"It doesn't, my dear. I love to have you go as it is right you should. But let me stay and hear about it afterwards. You are sweetest to me at home."

The lusty master of the house felt no such pangs; he promised to be Matilda's escort.

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"You won't be lonesome that evening, Emmy, 'Mandy'll keep you company, if she can sit up that late!"

"No one need keep me company. I will have plenty to think about. I shan't be lonesome; James will sit up in the hall till morning."

"And I'll chaperon Matildy all right. I won't promise to dance, but I'll take a wager she won't lack for partners. That young man Travis won't let you do that, I'll be bound!"

"He is to be Hélène's escort for the evening," said Matilda, without the slightest concern.

"I bet he'll dance the most with you."

Mr. Dolliver did not dream how nearly his prognostics for the great Atwood ball would meet fruition. But, as Benedict had so perfectly expressed it, "The gods were with him in all he undertook."

While the society members of the Dolliver family were joyfully anticipating the coming event, the Atwood ladies were in a fever of excitement, confusion, and discussion. The Dollivers, by their conciliatory lavishness with invitations,

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had made it compulsory for them to return the compliment.

“What shall we do about the Dollivers?” said Maud, with a contumelious peevishness.

“That was certainly a very genteel affair of theirs,” said Mrs. Atwood; “all excepting that ‘local option’ element of his; the result, I presume, of his long residence in a small place like Hackerstown.”

“That sort of thing is strained in a function where hundreds of people are concerned,” objected the elder Miss Atwood. Maud and her mother had surreptitiously thought that Matilda’s invitation might perhaps be suppressed, by an accidental omission. Such mistakes were not at all uncommon in a case of four or five hundred guests. But Angela had won the day by arguing:

“It would offend too many of our intimate friends. Some persons would guess your subterfuge. People in general, would say that we were snobs! For there are some old residents of Baltimore who still remember that *our* grandfather

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was a shoe-tinker in a small town of Vermont, who tapped at people's run-down heels from early morn till dewy eve." Angela had learned that it was politic not to score Matilda, and being slightly jealous of her sister, had won the game by saying decisively: "We must invite them all." But Matilda's poor card had trembled in the balance an hour or two, until Angela had concluded her speech. The Atwood valet called for the post, and all the invitations departed in unison.

The Dollivers' acceptance to that munificent affair was like crossing the Rubicon. The die was cast. There could be no recalcitrating move made.

The Hadley girls each received a card, and great excitement was caused thereby.

"What shall we wear?" was the choral exclamation. But another barrel from Minnesota solved the problem of the entire outfit. The three girls ripped and remodelled, planned and created the most stunning effects out of its contents. They toiled indefatigably for one week;

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all was in readiness, and they were prepared for the great ball.

"Isn't it nice, girls, to be all ready so long beforehand?" said Lucy, who was responsible for the precaution.

"Yes," replied Sophie for all. "Now, we won't have to break our necks at the last minute the way we usually do."

"I may make a few slight alterations in my toilette," digressed Edith. She was anticipating a great many dances with young Doctor Elmer Rasburn, to whose lot it fell this time to immolate himself on the sacrificial altar, by conducting what Mr. Dolliver called the "whole bunch" of Hadley sisters.

Unfortunately, the doctor had an engagement for the forepart of that evening; a surgical operation that would keep him until nearly eleven. But he would send the taxicab for them at half-past nine, and meet them later in the ball-room. Everything was arranged and settled, and the ball was just two weeks ahead.

In the meantime, the whole city was stirred by

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a notable event. The Duke of Beauchamps disembarked at Baltimore in the early days of December. The news of it rippled into high social circles and caused feverish anticipation. The Atwood limousine puffed up to the Del Bondios' several times a day and puffed back again. A constant pressure of animation and agitation seemed to prevail between the two houses.

Edith, a trifle enviously, perhaps, watched the cars rush past the longitudinal street nearest them.

"Well," she sighed, turning away, "they must be having great doings since the Duke's arrival."

"I shouldn't think you'd waste your time watching from your window what other people are doing," rebuffed Sophie. She was sitting by the open fireplace knitting woollen slippers for a Christmas present.

"I suspect they are getting ready for the ball with a vengeance," Edith continued, heedless of her sister's insinuation.

"People, when they assume an undertaking,

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usually are interested in its success, aren't they?" was Sophie's sapient observation.

"What is the date?"

"December twenty-first."

Sophie never hesitated, not the fraction of a second, for an answer to any question. The readiness of her tongue was equalled only by the warmth of her heart.

"No, it isn't," Edith promptly contradicted. And the other as promptly insisted:

"It is."

"Go look at your invitation and find out your mistake."

"Get your own; I don't need to look. I know. Anyhow I'm too busy finishing these slippers; you're only looking out the window."

Edith disdainfully wrinkled her nose.

"By the number of slippers you make," she bitingly remarked, "one would think you had to keep a centipede shod."

"Now, Edith," without the slightest pause in her work, Sophie resorted to wheedling, "do go up and find out—that's a dear. It won't take

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but a second, and I do so want to know positively." And in a fervent aside: "Thank goodness, it is n't a centipede!"

"I know it's the nineteenth," Edith flung across her shoulder, stalking stubbornly from the room to seek the invitation. Her seconds were prolonged into minutes. Sophie at last grew impatient.

"Why don't you come down?" she called.

"I can't find it," came carolling back from the upper regions.

"Well, ninny, get mine."

A pause, while Edith wondered why the suggestion had not occurred to her.

"Where is it?" she asked at last. Her voice had a muffled sound, as if she spoke from the depths of trunk or dresser-drawer.

"Heavens!" Sophie screamed. "How should I know?"

A sudden banging, rattling clatter from upstairs not only announced the eagerness of Edith's search, but startled another scream from Sophie.

"Edith!"

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That young lady's voice was next heard at the head of the stairs.

"What did you say?"

"Are you tearing the house down?" wailed Sophie.

"No, silly. I just dumped the dresser-drawers out on the floor. I hoped you'd remembered where your invitation was."

The overhead tumult immediately began again with renewed vigor, and Sophie despairingly cast her knitting aside and took a hand herself in the search.

They were obliged to give up at last, for not only Edith's invitation had disappeared in some darkly unaccountable manner, but neither Sophie's nor Lucy's could be brought to light.

"Where *is* Lucy?" Edith demanded, panting from her exertions and dropping heavily into the nearest chair.

Sophie wiped the tiny beads of perspiration from her brow and brushed back her dampened, disordered curls.

"Oh, sakes alive! Where *did* she go!" she cried

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in perplexity. Her face all at once lightened. "Why, come to think of it, she went to the Doyles'."

"Well," Edith announced, with a resigned air, "we'll just have to wait until she comes home. She'll know where hers is, that's certain. . . . I'm pretty sure, though, it's the twenty-first."

The two girls resumed their occupation amicably. Edith was really doing something; she was reading over music, a task that permitted occasional interruptions. They worked silently for two or three hours; yet no Lucy appeared. It was growing to be four o'clock, and the short winter day was darkening.

"Good Peter!" cried Sophie, looking out of the window in her turn and seeing no sign of her missing sister, "I hope they won't keep her to dinner. I'm as hungry as a bear, and don't like picked up scraps for dinner."

"Don't fret about that," replied Edith. "There is not much danger of the Doyles asking any one to a 'drop in' dinner, like that. Mrs. Doyle is so very formal, you know. She holds

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her hand out to you as if it were a ten-foot pole, to make you keep your distance."

"She doesn't do that with me. I don't see enough of her. I like Hélène awfully well; but I don't care much for her ma."

Just as the girls rose to put away their work there was a sound of familiar footsteps on the landing.

"That is Lucy," said Edith, running to open the door.

"What in the world have you been doing?" demanded Sophie.

"Why, nothing but visiting with Hélène."

"First, tell us the correct date of the Atwood ball," continued Sophie, dancing about Lucy with unseemly eagerness.

"I don't recall the date. But what is all this excitement about? Does not your invitation tell?"

"We have both mislaid ours. We can't find them anywhere."

"I felt sure you'd know where yours was," flattered Sophie, hopefully.

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“Of course, I know where it is,” affirmed Lucy. “Right on the table in my room where I keep my magazines and papers.”

“Go and get it, that’s a dear,” coaxed Edith. “We are neither of us sure of the date.”

Lucy went to her room with absolute confidence, and the two other girls followed her. “What has become of it?” she puzzled. “I had it right here under those magazines, or I may have slipped it in the bottom one for safety, — I sometimes do.”

“Oh, my prophetic soul!” ejaculated Sophie in dire dismay.

“What have you done with them?” urged Lucy. “I had six and there are only two left!”

“Methought I am — methought I was — man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I am!” began Sophie, moved to Shakespearean quotations at the contemplation of her own stupidity. “What did I do with them? Why, I gave them to that Salvation Army man who collects them every month for their Sunday-school.”

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“Now, not one of us knows the date of the ball!” Edith broke out with vexation. “Three invitations received in this family and not one to refer to for the date!”

“And we are requested to present the cards at the door!” added Lucy to enhance the general consternation.

“Well, I never did!” Sophie moaned, dropping into a chair with weary exhaustion.

“And I hope you never will again!” returned Edith.

“Now, girls, let us talk sensibly about the matter. Which of you is the surest of the date?” demanded Lucy.

“I’m very positive that it is after the twentieth, so I think it’s the twenty-first,” declared Sophie, with unshaken conviction.

“I thought it was the nineteenth, but I won’t insist upon it since I’m not sure,” said Edith, with uncommon meekness.

“If the day between was anything but Sunday, I would say the twentieth, if only to split the difference,” suggested Lucy. “But as it is,

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we will decide on Sophie's date, the twenty-first. She is the oldest and ought to have the choice. Now, do remember the date, one of you, and write it out on something in the hall so that we can't possibly forget it."

The two other girls relied implicitly on Lucy's practical good sense, and were satisfied. So the matter was settled. The appointed day arrived. The Hadley girls were the whole day getting ready for the ball. When seven o'clock came the dinner was over and everything of a servile or domestic nature was put out of the way. Only one thing was now left before them; the brilliant, dazzling, intoxicating scene of the ball! Lucy advised that each one take a nap from half-past seven to half-past eight in order to refresh herself for the evening, and all complied with unusual docility. They set the alarm clock beforehand lest they might fall into the nightly habit of prolonging sleep. They must waken in plenty of time to dress for the ball.

At half-after nine they began to look for the taxicab. They were all ready. The hour waxed

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to nine forty-five, and still the conveyance had not arrived.

"Perhaps some one would better 'phone; it may have slipped Elmer's mind. You know, he had a serious case on hand for to-night," was Lucy's thoughtful advice.

Edith was occupied in adjusting her head-gear, therefore Sophie called up the garage office.

"Have you an order for a cab to call at No. 205 Park Avenue?"

"Just one minute, please."

Sophie tapped the floor nervously with her foot as she sat waiting.

"Hello."

"No, madam, there is no order for No. 205 Park Avenue."

"Why, that's very strange! It must have been forgotten! Please send out one, immediately."

"At once, madam," was the reply.

Ten minutes later they were puffing toward the Atwood mansion. It was some distance away,

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so they had ample time to discuss their prospective movements upon arriving.

“It is ’way after ten, now, but Elmer said he could n’t possibly be there till half-past. It is no matter; we will get on all right,” planned Edith. “I know a number of the boys who are to usher, and they will escort us in with proper form.”

When they reached the scene of festivities, they noticed that the lower rooms alone were lighted.

“That’s mighty queer,” uttered Sophie, as they ascended the marble steps.

“Perhaps we are too early,” suggested Lucy. “Sometimes people give a dinner before the ball.”

They were obliged to press the electric button, as the huge batten doors were inhospitably closed. “A very strange approach to a ball!” Sophie went on sputtering.

At last the magnificent butler opened the door. They entered and all stood in the broad vestibule, looking at each other in a blank sort of way. Finally the butler said, holding out his tray,

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"Your cards, if you please."

"We haven't got them," replied Sophie,
"We've —"

"We forgot them," interrupted Edith, hastily.
"If you will ask Miss Angela to come, I will explain to her."

"Miss Angela is at the present moment dining with a party of friends invited for the evening. Will the ladies step into the withdrawing room and await them?"

With a shocked and confused look, Edith asked,

"Is not this the evening of the ball?"

"I beg your pardon, no, miss. The ball is on the twenty-third."

Mentally speaking, Sophie uttered a shriek of despair. Actually, she merely said:

"Oh, we must have mistaken the place. We will withdraw altogether," and they rapidly descended. The butler followed them down several steps.

"Shall I 'phone for your carriage to conduct you to the right place?"

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"Thank you, no; it is only a short distance away. We will walk."

As soon as they got beyond his hearing, the chorus began.

"Who ever heard of such a lunatic performance!" drawled Sophie.

"And at the Atwoods', too, of all people! I wouldn't have had it happen for the world! Your subterfuge, Sophie, was lame, halt, and blind. Angela knows there is no other ball worth attending to-night, and even if there were, we shouldn't be going. I trust the conversation will not be repeated to her! She knows we don't go to balls more than once in a coon's age."

"Well, girls, don't let us get too warmed up over this affair; we might catch cold, this breezy night. Edith, gather your cape around you well. We will walk to the next corner and take the trolley home. Then, we'll go to sleep and forget all about it."

The two girls meekly agreed and they rode home in silence. Each one felt her share of the reflex action. Sophie thought:

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“I wish I had n’t told that fib about the other place.”

Lucy’s anxiety was:

“Now, there is that taxicab! I’ll have to pay for it, as it was I who told them to ’phone for it.”

Edith’s hope was:

“If only Elmer does n’t hear of it! — I should be mortified to ashes!”

When they reached home and separated for the night, Sophie said consolingly:

“We’ll try it again on the twenty-third, girls. Repetition makes perfection.”

CHAPTER IX

THE ATWOOD BALL

*"Look to the blowing Rose about us — 'Lo,
Laughing,' she says, 'into the world I blow,
At once the silken tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw.'"*

AS Matilda had said, Mr. Travis was to be Hélène Doyle's escort on that occasion, and according to Mr. Dolliver's prophecy, Benedict was to dance oftenest with her. Mrs. Doyle was in a very delicate and irritable humor that evening. She had not been well since the Dolliver banquet, and was making a great sacrifice of her personal inclination by accompanying Hélène. She did not mention the fact that her suspicious curiosity made it imperative for her to be there.

Upon entering the ball-room, Benedict's eyes instituted an expectant search for Matilda. Her father's car had just been leaving when he and

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his party had arrived; he knew, therefore, that she was in the ball-room which was filling rapidly. Disappointed at first in his efforts to locate her, he turned his attentions to Hélène in order to talk about Matilda. His eyes were still searching the crowd, as he halted in front of Hélène.

“Surely you are going to dance?” he said, earnestly surveying her.

“I don’t know,” doubtfully. “I almost fear to leave mother, she is so unwell —”

“Stuff!” Benedict broke in, with man’s lofty contempt for feminine weakness and irresolution. “If she was well enough to venture here to-night, she’s well enough to spare you as often as you care to dance. There are lots of nice fellows here; *you’ll* not want for partners.”

The girl’s sole answer was her faint, cryptic smile.

“Anyhow,” Benedict rattled on with boyish ardor, “let’s move over to the entrance. You girls always enjoy keeping tab on who comes and who stays away. Wonder if the Duke’s arrived?”

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Again his eyes eagerly scanned the throng; but he was not looking for Monsieur le duc.

“No,” quietly replied Hélène, “the Del Bondio party has not yet arrived. You know what a stickler for the formalities Mr. Del Bondio is. If you saw him talking to any beautiful lady — Matilda, for instance — ”

“Or you — ”

She smiled again and tapped his arm lightly with her fan.

“—you would think he was Talleyrand conversing with Mme. Récamier,” she finished composedly.

“Hélène!” His happy face tried to assume a pained expression. “That’s a poor comparison to come from you; it makes me think of some kind of smelly face-powder instead of Mr. D-B., striking a pose.”

“Well, then,” she retorted, “it’s not so bad after all.”

But her nice irony was lost upon her companion. She realized that she had his attention only intermittently. His eyes returned from another

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eager scrutiny of the assembled guests, but at once they brightened and smiled back into hers.

"I suppose," he spoke derisively, "that the feminine contingent would be horribly disappointed if D-B.'s Duke failed to show up to-night. For my part I should not care much. What chance have the rest of us poor chaps in — I was about to say in the presence of royalty, but a Duke's as bad."

"But this one, I believe, is a good Duke. There," with sudden animation, "turn your gaze in the opposite direction and you will behold your dazzling luminary."

Travis stared hard at his beautiful companion.

"Huh!" he said bluntly in a moment. "How did you know whom — that I was looking for any particular individual?"

"Benedict! Hurry!" There was a trace of excitement in the usually tranquil girl's demeanor. "Hurry — before the crowd eclipses her!"

He obeyed. He caught sight of Matilda in her marvellous costume, radiant under the bril-

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liant lights. And then, alas! not she but Hélène was eclipsed — from his thoughts.

“You will excuse me just a moment, won’t you, Hélène?” He was somewhat confused. “I must see her — before the music begins, you know.”

The sudden awkwardness which seized her erstwhile cavalier was so foreign to his customary ease and grace of bearing that Hélène Doyle regarded him in mild surprise. But then the occult smile again stirred her lips, and all emotion was veiled.

“Surely,” she murmured, her eyes downcast. “And you are under no obligation to return, since I am not dancing.”

The look of gratitude that leaped to his frank eyes was doubtless involuntary, but Hélène caught it in a swift upward glance. An instant later, when she heard her mother’s voice at her ear, he was crossing the hall with more haste than dignity. Her thoughts and feelings were still submerged in the phantom of a smile.

“You were foolish, Hélène,” Mrs. Doyle com-

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plained, "to call his attention to her. You are always so impolitic."

"Why try to keep him here," said the girl, calmly, "since I must disappoint him?"

"Disappoint him?" echoed Mrs. Doyle. "I am not sure that I understand you."

The girl, however, was abruptly saved from becoming more explicit.

"Behold, mother," she announced, "there comes his grace, the Duke."

Mrs. Doyle's attention was diverted. The other chaperons were likewise trying to get a glimpse of his highness. The Atwood ladies were smiling nervously.

Mrs. Atwood, who was an obese little woman, always gave one the impression of being filled with highly colored sawdust; hard and prickly, she was, as irresponsive as a horse-hair sofa. To-night, she was bubbling over with importance. The desire to shine and please was uncomfortably evident; in the tight twist of her hair, the studied folds of her dress, the artificial

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bloom of her cheeks, she was painfully good-looking.

Monsieur le Duc de Beauchamps was creating a tremendous sensation among these unknown foreigners by his genial courtesy, his gracious and cordial manner. This was all perfectly natural to him, owing to the accomplished and valiant gentlemen of whose superlatively rare class he was the scion. A youth of barely twenty-two, yet a powerful figure upon whom the eyes of the multitude were riveted. He spoke in absolutely perfect English to those surrounding him. Miss Maud and Miss Angela were among them. His phrases, couched in that exquisite delicacy peculiar to the French, brought waves of delight to their expectant ears. There was a murmur of solicitude outside the favored circle. Would he confine his regards only to a few? No; he began to observe the whole assembly. Being tall he could command the brilliant scene to perfection, and it was enough to enthuse almost any young man of the world.

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He watched the fair ladies in their bewildering toilettes and his eyes spoke admiration.

At the same moment Matilda Dolliver was crossing the dancing-hall upon Benedict Travis's arm. The Duke abruptly halted.

"Who is that young lady?" he asked. The sudden checking of their leisurely progress, the unwonted fervor in his tone, made Angela look quickly up at him. Following his gaze, she too beheld the couple.

"Oh, that girl. She is the daughter of one of Baltimore's leading merchants and manufacturers."

The lack of warmth in the reply caused De Beauchamps to glance curiously at his companion. A slight ironical smile twitched his lips.

"Ah!" he said, moving forward again. And Angela, thinking that her response had dashed his interest, ventured further:

"Scarcely of an equal station with your grace."

"Doubtless you are correct," with a dry courtesy that escaped the girl. "The aristocracy of industry is far more ennobling to a man's char-

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acter than a life of idleness, indolence, and luxury. Believe me, I am a toiler, both with my hands and such brains as God has given me."

Angela so far forgot herself that she stared at the Duke in surprise; but she was quick-witted enough to realize that she had made a mistake in her estimation of the young nobleman. She at once recovered herself.

"Judged by such a standard," she said promptly, "then Matilda should be at least a princess."

"Then pray do me the honor of presenting me to your princess."

Angela bit her lip in chagrin, but she could not refuse, and a few seconds later the Duke was bowing low over Matilda's hand.

"Your highness," said he, with a twinkle, "you bear my favorite of all French names—Mathilde."

For once all the careful attention and training bestowed upon her by the Misses Pettingill went down in shipwreck under the wave of confusion that swept over her.

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“But—highness,” she stammered, rosy red to her coiffure. “I—I don’t under—” She became all at once speechless, staring distressedly from one to another, while Travis regarded the Duke haughtily.

The nobleman was quick to discern her embarrassment and as quick to relieve it.

“Pardon me,” he said, at once grave. “I was but furthering a bit of jesting information just now imparted to me by Mademoiselle Atwood.”

Before he could proceed further Matilda looked to Angela for an explanation. That young lady was now wretchedly embarrassed herself; she was placed in the unenviable predicament of either giving a verbatim report of the conversation between herself and the Duke, or else courting his disapprobation by a lack of candor. The young man appeared to realize—and enjoy—the situation.

At last Angela floundered through some sort of explanation and hastened away. The incident was closed.

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“You speak our language, perhaps?” De Beauchamps asked.

“I do,” returned Matilda, her color heightening again.

Monsieur de Beauchamps immediately opened up a rapid-fire of exclamations expressive of both delight and surprise at the discovery. During a full half-hour they conversed with that vivacity which only the French know.

Verily, the Misses Pettingill were this night apotheosized.

Travis sat moodily near the two young people, though with a growing, depressing conviction that he was not one of them. He formed the hypotheneuse of a triangle that was self-sufficient as a straight line. Matilda, he reflected with some bitterness, might be in very truth a princess, De Beauchamps a courtier in temporary high favor, while every other man in the hall was a humble vassal not only willing but eager to do her slightest bidding.

Duke?—faugh! The fellow made him sick; he was like all the rest of them: a rake, a spend-

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thrift, everything despicable. He was only after Matilda's money, or that of the next innocent who crossed his path, who could boast a bigger bank-account.

But as he watched the young nobleman's frank, animated countenance these reflections were neither convincing nor consoling. His own face was heavy with gloom, his heart depressed; he was banished, already an exile.

Quite disregarding of the fact that he was on her card for the first dance, he all at once rose and flung himself into the joyous throng, painfully conscious that his departure had been unnoticed and that Matilda was giving her hand to the Duke for the first number, oblivious that it was by right his.

His — right? What right had a trusted friend against this interloper with a title, this blue-blooded adventurer? Women were merciless, cruel creatures! All except *Hélène*. Ah, yes, *Hélène*. She was an exception, was *Hélène*; one who would never disregard the obligations of friendship under the fascination of an unknown in-

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truder to their charmed circle, be he a duke or even a reigning sovereign.

With a sudden sense of guilt, he reflected that he had treated H  l  ne rather shabbily to-night. Well, he had been amply punished; he would go hunt her up and try to make amends—or, at least, this praiseworthy determination was his interpretation of the great yearning for sympathy which burned in his bosom.

In the meantime others were rapidly following Matilda's and the Duke's example. The animation and gaiety rose. Never had a ball been so fraught with the novelty of such an experience within their generation. It was something unconscionable. Matilda Dolliver, handsome though she was, in the lead of all of Baltimore's society belles!

“I never saw such infatuation on the part of a young man!” remarked one matron who had several eligible daughters. “One would think he was her sworn *fianc  *.”

“It is due, I opine, to some kind of mesmerism which she possesses,” said another. “The

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father uses it in his business affairs. The luck that man has is stupendous!"

"But don't you admit that her beauty has something to do with it?" ventured a third.

"No; I don't think she is so wonderfully pretty," retorted the mother of the marriageable seven. "There are plenty of girls in Baltimore who are just as attractive to me. It is quite incomprehensible."

Now at this stage of their discussion old Monsieur Del Bondio, who was circulating among the elderly spinsters and widows, sat down beside these prejudiced matrons. He began at once to extol the young couple; the charms and graces of the young *demoiselle* with whom his distant relative was dancing. He said good-humoredly that the boy evinced rare good taste. The irritated hearers were obliged to moderate their opinions considerably in order to meet his superior amiability and judgment.

During this time, Benedict had found his way back to Hélène, greatly to Mrs. Doyle's relief.

"You might as well dance a little, daughter,

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if you care to. I will be very comfortable here with Mr. Del Bondio to entertain me." For the old gentleman had moved up to a more genial clime.

Benedict hailed the suggestion. Slipping an arm about H  l  ne's waist, they went whirling amid the flock of happy dancers. Travis, when his eyes met the fine blue ones, wore a look of exultant triumph, instead of one of dejection or disappointment. H  l  ne was a perfect dancer, and he was proud to pass Matilda and the Duke several times with so accomplished a partner. While they were doing a slow, graceful waltz that so well became H  l  ne's classic figure, she said to him in her usual undertone, "You must try it again with Matilda."

Instantly the dark look once more shadowed his face. He remained silent.

"Surely," H  l  ne laughingly pressed him, "you are not going to surrender to a Frenchman, even if he is a duke, are you?"

He glumly replied, "It is not a question of surrender."

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And Hélène said no more.

Mrs. Doyle and old Mr. Del Bondio were seated side by side, watching the two.

"How well they look together," said the lady. "Benedict is so considerate of Hélène; his attentions are ideal."

"Yes," replied the chivalrous old man. "Tonight, Miss Dolliver is the glowing jewel; but Hélène is always the gleaming pearl."

At length they sat down after the wholesome enjoyment which young people find in the exercise. Benedict stood up beside Hélène, fanning her with brotherly attention, and jesting with a forced gaiety of which the girl was keenly sensible. He did not go near Matilda the rest of the evening. Mrs. Doyle thought he really ought to fetch the Duke and introduce him to Hélène.

"She speaks French quite as well, if not better than Matilda," she suggested. "She might make as good an impression on him."

Benedict declined the honor, but he was willing to pass it over to Mr. Del Bondio, who was

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charmed with such a piece of knight-errantry and went to bring Monsieur de Beauchamps where the ladies were sitting. Then he departed to busy himself with finding other partners. He waltzed once around with each of the Hadley girls. He even went so far as to pivot Angela through a long redowa, in fact, disported himself like a young man who was enjoying the evening mightily.

When the hour waned far past twelve, Mrs. Doyle wished to retire from the festive scene if Hélène had enjoyed sufficient pleasure.

"Certainly, mother. I am at your service whenever you are ready."

"At once, then, for my head is beginning to ache with all this light and noise."

"If you don't care to go to the supper, may I not bring some light refreshment for you and Hélène? I'll find a waiter immediately," offered Travis.

"No, I thank you, not even that, Benedict," replied Mrs. Doyle, wearily. "Doctor Rasburn has cautioned me to indulge in nothing to-night."

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They went to the dressing-room to be enveloped in their wraps, while Benedict hurried down to have his taxicab brought to the door. When once they were all seated, he leaned over and caught H  l  ne's hand. Mrs. Doyle, her head pillowed on the cushion, was peacefully dozing.

"God bless you!" he whispered fervently, looking intently into her eyes.

"I am surprised that you should take it so hard," she returned half-mockingly, yet with an undercurrent of genuine sympathy that did not elude Travis.

"You are the best and gentlest of friends, H  l  ne; I shall always love you. I know that in your heart, anyhow, there is always some concern for my welfare. My dear, dear sister!"

The dim light only partially revealed the masking smile. She returned the pressure of his fingers and quickly withdrew her hand.

"You know, Benedict," she said steadily, "that you always have my sympathetic interest. What can I say to you now?"

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"Nothing. But I feel that I am to blame somewhere for something—an act of omission, perhaps. What can it be?"

"No, no," she returned, still speaking low. "You are over-wrought; that is all. You will feel right about it in the morning. Consider Matilda's fondness for everything French; give her time to adjust herself to this novel experience."

"The glamour of a title!" bitterly muttered the young fellow.

"I think so. And so much the better: it can never dazzle her again."

"It never would have caught you, *Hélène*," he said earnestly. "Why? Why are you so different?"

This time she laughed outright at his impulsiveness.

"It is possible that I am not so different after all," she said. "Maybe you will find it out some day."

"Find out?" explosively. "What is there to find out about you that I don't already know?"

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Fiddlesticks! You're the rippingest girl a fellow ever had for a friend — a sister; I need know nothing more; that's all I want to know."

"Very well, then," Hélène announced with abruptly assumed lightness; "we have arrived at the last word — good-night — and home at the same time."

He got out to see them safely in.

Hélène waved to him from the vestibule. "You will have forgotten all about it by to-morrow," she cheerfully affirmed.

"Good-night," was all he said.

He walked away mentally resolving *not* to forget it, and turned once more toward the intoxicating ball-room.

Under ordinary circumstances Benedict would have gone straight to his own apartment after leaving Hélène and her mother. But to-night there was one insatiable desire to look again upon the scene that had struck his heart an excruciating blow, which swung his indecision into quick action. He had, up to that time, looked upon Matilda Dolliver as a pleasing but

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remote possibility. But when he recalled that the Duke of Beauchamps had appropriated Matilda right from his hands to promenade the length of the hall upon his arm, whereas a moment before she had been upon his own, a feeling as akin to jealousy as he had ever known gripped his steadfast heart. He followed her with scorching eyes. He took no notice of the crowd around him, who, like him, were struck with amazement at the young Duke's rapid and unconcealed courtship.

The two were sitting in animated conversation after dancing. Benedict waited for nearly two hours, trying to catch her eye, to see if she would smile a recognition. But he could not, so absorbed was she. Just as he was preparing to leave with his desire unfulfilled, the Dolliver car whisked up to the entrance. He stopped and stood a while to see what should happen.

Presently, Papa Dolliver appeared and nodded to Benedict with an air of extreme satisfaction. He seated himself comfortably inside.

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Travis was moved to tarry yet longer, urged by the tugging at his heart strings. It was not long before Matilda followed, still upon the Duke's arm.

He gave her his hand to assist her in entering the car, and continued his adieux until they were fairly out of sight.

Benedict told an attendant to call his cab. It was the old friend who waited for him every morning at Cheltenham Court.

"Whea' abaout, suh?"

Benedict eyed him fiercely and muttered in his teeth:

"To the devil!"

"I didn't catch that, suh," said the ducky, coming nearer.

"Cheltenham Court, then," he growled, disappearing inside.

"Mistah Travis am in a mighty po' humor, this mornin'," cogitated the fellow, starting his honking machine with vociferous noises. He was surprised, for it was customary with the young gentlemen of society to repair to their

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clubs after such entertainments to talk over the affair, to drink more, perhaps, until daybreak surprised them in their dress-suits. Then they would retire to their private rooms to refresh themselves with a few hours' sleep and exchange their attire for a more presentable morning-suit.

Travis was not a club member. He rarely frequented such places, except at the invitation of some friend.

Having been brought up in a beautiful country home, he was strictly a "home body." He preferred to spend his evenings with his friends, the Doyles, the Hadleys, Matilda Dolliver, where he found a different entertainment, to be sure, but youth loves the spiciness of variety.

When he reached his rooms at the Court he went to bed but not to sleep. His habitually peaceful mind was in a turmoil of agitation.

What was this feeling which had so suddenly overwhelmed him and caused him to act in a manner unrecognizable to himself? Was he in love? The thought almost made him laugh from its strangeness. He had thought himself invul-

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nerable. Love — great, absorbing, all-embracing — that stirred the souls of poets, would not come to him till middle life. The hearts of the young were not capable of nurturing such a love. He had been so deeply engrossed in his profession until now; his social distractions were but a necessary lever to preserve the wholesome equipoise of his keen active mind. What, then, was this maelstrom of conflicting emotions? Was it but a “false creation of the heart-oppressed brain” that had swayed Macbeth? He would try to sleep; that balm alone could restore his natural thoughts and enable him to reason clearly when morning came.

While Benedict was thus employed, Matilda, at the same hour, stood alone before her mirror in all the splendor of her ball attire. She gazed at herself; there was no trace of fatigue in her glistening eyes, for their light was derived from the inexhaustible source of conquests and triumphal achievements that have bathed the eyes of human beings since the world began. For the first time in her life she realized that she

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was beautiful and that her beauty was her strongest weapon. She felt like a conqueror who on the eve of battle is not absolutely sure of success, but whose hopefulness is unbounded. She was thinking of the young Duke, of his signalized attentions, his obvious preference, and she was attracted to him by two strong, polemic forces, — his nationality and his rank.

In her studies, she had been sedulous but not brilliant, yet that evening, in conversing with Monsieur de Beauchamps, she had discovered herself parrying witticisms with him and coming out victorious.

There is something surprising in the very actions, thoughts, and movements of a person born and bred in an environment wholly different from one's own. This, combined with his exalted station, had fixed Matilda's attention. The mystery and triumph of it all held her spell-bound before her mirror until Mrs. Dolliver's gentle tap at her door warned her that it was nearly morning.

Then, she, too, went to sleep and to dream —

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a vision of prophetic intent. She was mounted on a spirited white horse and stood at the foot of a country road such as she had known when a girl. It was a cool, attractive road edged on either side with tall trees whose branches overhead intertwined in soft embrace. It led up a gently sloping hill where deep mysterious greenness courted desire. A feeling of something like joy impelled her to pursue the ascent. Once she looked back, to see at the foot of the hill her mother smiling and waving farewell, Edith, Hélène, Benedict, — her old associates of former days, — and she was leaving them all behind with no tinge of regret in her heart; the mysterious clump of green, arching in the distance, seemed to hold such treasures that all the blessings of her past life were by it obliterated.

CHAPTER X

BENEDICT SUCCUMBS TO NATURE'S FORCES

*"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread — and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness —
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"*

WHEN Benedict arose the next morning, the clear, crisp, matutinal freshness of a day in late December should have prompted him to quick, decisive action. Strange to say, unlike his usual self, he was still swinging in the balance. Like Macbeth he "had no spur to prick the sides of his intent." His poor spurs had been so blunted by the rebuffs of the previous night, that the inevitable reaction had set in. He thought, as he walked the distance to his office with vigorous step: "I will wait — because I must."

As he took his place at his desk, he found that

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the hours of sleep and the brisk walk had somewhat allayed the fever of his fantasy. Yet his mind was not altogether restored to its normal assumption of irritating facts. In spite of efforts to the contrary, he was obsessed with impressions of Matilda and the Duke forcing themselves upon his carefully prepared judicial propositions. They blockaded his powers of induction. They staggered his clinching arguments. They made him realize that there were incidents which, sometimes, caused even a logician's reason to totter upon its lofty throne. It was no use; he could not concentrate his faculties sufficiently to do independent work. The will, rising superior to the other composite divisions of the mind, would not commingle to harmonize with his purpose. He must subdue it by merging it into the thoughts of the great men who had created the law. He pulled down one of the heavy volumes above and steeped himself in a long, profound extract from the works of Richard Hooker upon the "Necessity and Majesty of the Law."

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Benedict was very earnest, very determined to let no trivial circumstance impede his ascent in the dignified profession which he had chosen. But even in this he had reckoned without his host. He had not thought of the tremendous forces of nature that are able to toss a man, especially a young man, far out of his instinctive ideas of duty; that make him bend, yield, and oscillate like a bubble, ere he regain strength and power to proceed on his rightful way.

Travis spent the entire morning at his task. Then, by some trifling occurrence, his memory was jogged to the recollection that it was the day before Christmas. He had been so engrossed with the happenings of the past few days that the nearness of the festive season had escaped him.

“Ye great Olympian gods!” he exclaimed. “What a consummate ass I have been to forget everything and everybody!”

He closed his voluminous book with a resounding flop, and left the place, saying to himself,

“Now, to the Court to feed the inner man,

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then, to the first *bijoutiers*, and other shops of the city, to contend with the army of belated buyers." On reaching Cheltenham Court he hailed Sambo, his favored taxicabby, and told him to wait just a minute till he had swallowed his lunch.

"We'll put for the city all afternoon; but we'll wind up at Willow Brook where we'll be sure of a good square meal."

He disappeared a few moments, leaving the darky on the steering seat grinning at the prospect of a good feast. When Travis had finished his meal, they both spun to town to conclude the necessary shopping. When he had finished, having remembered every one, according to his custom, he said,

"It is five o'clock and dark enough to play Santa Claus about town."

They stopped at the various residences; the Doyles', and the Hadleys', where the darky left mysterious-looking packages, and skipped away. They worked up to the Charles Street Avenue mansion, depositing there something for Mrs. and

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Miss Dolliver. The Del Bondio equipage was standing in the *porte-cochère*, so Sambo delivered his gifts at the front door, where Amanda received them, being curiously and stealthily on duty.

Benedict wondered what the carriage was doing there. Was the Duke just coming, or going? Never mind, he would drown the memory of his insolence by scaling to the front seat beside Sambo to face the wind and cold on their way through the beautiful Green Spring Valley—green even in the winter, owing to its tall cypress and pine trees whose branches were fretting the new-fallen snows.

Willow Brook lay in the heart of that Green Spring Valley, with hill and dale beyond, and the bending willows, from which it derived its name, shedding their icy tears of mourning upon the frosty stream below. Benedict felt that its peaceful, restful solitude would balm his perturbed spirit as nothing else could. The house, surmounted by its snow-thatched roof, looked a warm and cordial welcome from within. Both

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Major and Mrs. Travis had heard the honking warning of his emissary, and were at the open door to receive him.

“Bully for you, Dict, my boy!” said his father.

“My son, my son!” and Mrs. Travis held him in a motherly embrace.

It was always so when he came home. His presence was the crowning point of all their days of merrymaking. The adulations and compliments poured in from all sides.

“What, another Christmas and no *fiançailles* to make gay the festal board!” said the Major jocundly. “How is that, Benedict? I thought you’d bring home some fair damsel with you this year, on approbation.”

“Not yet, father,” the young man sought, by an affected lightness, to turn a topic which, now, was far from agreeable. “Life is too serious with me to indulge in such frivolities.”

“Let him be a boy, our own boy, as long as he will, say I!” was Mrs. Travis’s imploration.

“That’s right,” readily agreed the Major,

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always falling in with his wife's views. "Stick to business, my boy; make hay while the sun shines; that's what your forefathers all did. There is always plenty of time for a fellow like you to spend at love-making."

The sensible construction his father put upon his own words, struck him a little incongruously, set beside his actions of the night before.

After dinner they all sat around the blazing log fire with their feet upon the big bear rug on which he had romped as a child. He told them all about his work, his hopes, and ambitions for the future. He told modestly of his rising successes in his profession; but failed to volunteer one word about his social diversions. His almost studied avoidance of the subject caused his father to introduce it.

"How are Hélène and Mrs. Doyle?" he asked.

"Oh, Hélène is all right," was the indifferent reply; "she can't be otherwise. I can't say as much for Mrs. Doyle; she is always ailing."

Mrs. Travis murmured sympathetically.

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"How unfortunate," she said. "I am very sorry for Hélène."

But the Major blindly persisted. "Where is your enthusiasm for the fair Miss Dolliver whom you used to extol so highly? And her father—has he still the Midas touch?"

"Mr. Dolliver still pursues his monumental climb of the financial ladder."

Mrs. Travis noted his ignoring of half of the question, and the intuition of her mother's heart immediately seized upon a meaning in the son's silences. Although she was troubled, she realized how unpleasant must be to Benedict their effort to force his confidence. She knew his sensitive nature; if she read aright the cause of his reticence, she knew that their inquisitiveness was making him inwardly cringe. So she playfully chided her husband into talking of inconsequential.

"Can't you see that Benedict is tired, my dear?" she gently pointed out. "He would much rather sit comfortably with us and listen to what we have to say. Retire whenever you feel like

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it, my son; you must suffer nothing that may mar the enjoyment of your visit."

He was very grateful, and in a little while retired.

Although he was in truth very weary, before going to bed, he gazed a moment at the glowing firmament from the window of his boyhood days. In the glittering stars, he saw reflected only Matilda's eyes; and those stars did not leave him till their mirrored reality had been dispelled by the morning light.

He spent Christmas and the day following at home, that benign spot which had ever proved a Lethe to his youthful woes! In spite of his mother's fond insistence to prolong his visit, the stress and pressure of city life, at this especial season, lured him thither. So soon did he feel the surfeit of those two days of rest and calm. He longed for the surging billows of the life that had first taught his heart to suffer. Such is the madness of youth. It is willing to exchange the ways of peace and oblivion for the raging sea without, often to find itself sub-

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merged by its overwhelming breakers! Benedict returned to the city, to that complex life of strenuous labor, and its counter-weight of social distractions which had tortured his heart.

One morning, on his way to the office, he stopped at the Doyles'. He lingered a moment to glean a little of Hélène's beneficial advice.

"This life of protracted dissipation is too much for you, Benedict, you look a little haggard, this morning," she said.

"Haggard?" resented Travis, "I don't feel haggard—never felt better in my life. What makes you think it?"

"You cannot fool me, Benedict Travis; your assumption of indifference betrays the effort. I could not help noticing you at the theatre, last night."

"I know what you refer to; but I want to tell you that I should be perfectly contented to let things remain as they are, if it wasn't for that *coquin* of a Frenchman who comes to spoil all our fun!" He smiled quizzically at her. "Ministering Angel, what is your counsel?"

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“My advice to you,” she said, with prim severity, “is that if you care so much for Matilda, you declare yourself to her, and thus establish your true position.”

“You see,” Hélène pursued, “you are too much of a *dilettante*.”

“It’s not that. It is that when I am with you, Hélène, I think more calmly, more consecutively. Let me consider a moment.”

She smiled at him kindly. “It is right and just that you should; *I* claim no jurisdiction over you.”

“I wouldn’t mind if you did. I have given you every cause to exercise it. You are my veritable Mentor; it is for me to be a faithful Telemachus. I will do as you propose. I will see Matilda before many days.” He rose to go and held out his hand. She took it and gave it an added pressure of encouragement as she said,

“Plead your cause well. You are able to do it. You ought to win in that as in everything else.”

She followed him to the door, the mystical

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smile still upon her lips, until he was far down the street. Then she closed it to shut out the too glaring light of day.

Benedict continued his way to the office, moulding and remoulding these thoughts: *Hélène* is always a good counsellor. She knows *Matilda's* preferences; they have been daily friends for so long! She advises me to plead my cause. She thinks I ought to win.

Five months ago, the thought of winning *Matilda* would have seemed an easy goal. But now, the advent of this foreigner, a man of wealth, birth, rank, and good address, was threatening the balance of power among other suitors in that exclusive circle of society.

Benedict was not nervous. The women who had been his friends were gifted with evenly balanced, well-ordered minds. He knew not the feeling or the malady. He was not afraid; he had met so far nothing he was unable to conquer. Then why did his resolution stagger? He had never spoken of love to any woman. No other had ever stirred the embryonic germ-

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ings of that great passion. He felt he must prepare as for a combat. The thought of facing Matilda Dolliver with words of love made him grow weak. Yet he had conjured up in his mind scores of endearing terms in thinking of her. Would his ready speech fail him when he came to touch upon a subject in which he had had so little practice?

He would write to her that very night, begging an interview, that she, at least, might be prepared. Their relations had been so friendly, so cordial, yet so free from sentiment. He had never been able to guess just how she regarded him. The emotion he felt in his heart for her had expanded only that night of the ball, when he saw another claiming the privileges which he craved.

His proverbial good fortune guided him even in the choice of time for his interview. One evening, in the week following the New Year, had accidentally been overlooked by the promoters of social activity. It was like a lull in the tempest; and Benedict's heart bounded

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with hope when he received a dainty *billet*, bearing the Dolliver insignia, granting his request. She also added that she would be happy to see him, as there was nothing afoot for that evening.

All of Benedict's previous trepidations vanished. Buoyant with the thought that if Matilda had not cared for him, she would not have acceded so readily to his petition, he mounted the steps of the Charles Street Avenue mansion, almost sure of success. The house was dimly lighted below and above stairs, as it was the Dolliver custom to do, when they were not expecting a large company. His frugal habits had never left Ario, even though he had grown to be a very rich man. In large projects he was inordinately lavish. In the lesser ones, he exercised thrift. There was no cause for a display of brilliant lights to-night. Delicate Mrs. Dolliver retired early to rest when her husband's presence was required at the down-town office. He had deemed it a good evening to absent himself. He bade his wife an affectionate good-bye.

“Go to bed early, Emmy dear, and get a good

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night's rest. You'll have nothing to keep you waking. Matilda'll be entertaining a beau, and I'll be home soon after ten."

Benedict's path was, therefore, clear. When he was ushered into what Matilda was pleased to call the *petit salon*, where she liked best to receive her intimates, the light immediately blazed up.

"Turn that down a little, will you?" he said to the butler. "We don't want broad daylight in here."

The man complied, with a knowing smile, showing he understood the other's mission. In a very few moments Matilda entered. She had been waiting for him, and went straight to him with both hands extended.

"I am so glad you have given me this opportunity to—explain some things to you!"

He had taken both her hands and was still holding the right one, as he said,

"You need make no explanation to me, Matilda; there is only one thing I wish to ask of you."

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"You are always so generous," she broke in, "and we have been such good friends! I did not want to think I had disregarded your great courtesy, that evening. I hoped to make compensation. But you did not once come near me. I feared you might be offended."

"Never with you," he made reply, as they sat down side by side.

"I have really longed to see you, to have a talk with you. It seems as if I had so much to tell you of the happenings of the past two weeks. You have been away? You received my note of thanks for your exquisite remembrance?"

"Yes, to both," he replied smiling. He had never seen her so animated, so free to speak of herself. There was abandon and effusion in the manner with which she received him.

"I went home for Christmas, but the desire to be near you brought me back to Baltimore."

"You are not only generous, but kind. I felt as if I must talk with you. I know no one else to whom I can open my thoughts as candidly as I can to you."

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He felt the complexity of her meaning, which threw a shadow upon his ardor, yet he said,

"I thank you sincerely for your confidence. What is it you have to tell me? Let me play at being your confessor, — perhaps, your legal advisor; I will try to excel in both offices to serve you."

Matilda breathed a sigh of relief and continued:

"We have met very frequently of late."

"Not with me?" he put in.

"No; I was speaking of Monsieur de Beauchamps. Have you conversed with him sufficiently to form an opinion?"

"I have spoken with him very little. Personally, I should think you would have had the best opportunity to form the opinion you ask of me; but I will say frankly, that from the standpoint you speak of, I think him a very attractive young man, a little too attractive to suit me."

"Benedict! What do you mean?"

"I mean that, using your own words, we

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have been too good friends for me to stand by and see, without resenting it, a foreigner, duke though he is, step in and make love to you."

"Love is entirely out of the question with me," said Matilda. "I know not the word or the feeling, save for the love I bear my parents and my friends. I should have to learn to love the man who wished to marry me. That was one of the few things not included in the Pettingill curriculum, the kind of love you mean."

"Could n't you learn to love me, Matilda? — not a little, but a great deal. I want as much as I am able to give."

She looked at him with a coyly coquettish little smile.

"I think I could; but I do not want to."

"Matilda!" exclaimed Benedict, in an agony of spirit. "Don't tell me you have no heart; your face, your personality, your whole attitude belies it."

"Indeed, I have a very large heart. I love many people dearly, but not with that other love; the greatest and best, they say it is! At this

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point of my career, the only feeling that surmounts all others with me, is the achievement of a great social triumph. Monsieur de Beauchamps offers me this."

"Have you accepted him?" gasped Benedict.

"Not yet; but my hand has been asked."

"Oh, Matilda," pleaded the wounded lover, "have you thought of the consequences of an international marriage for an American woman?"

"The difference in nationality is the very thing which attracts me most," said Matilda.

"As a school girl, my first ambition was the study of French. I had an instinctive desire to perfect myself in that language, in order that I might later be able to converse fluently with any one from France. I have no fears on the point of congeniality, nor of sordid monetary aims. Monsieur de Beauchamps *pere's* fortune, in lands and collaterals, exceeds my father's," Matilda went on to explain, with cool, but smiling calculation.

Travis was on the point of suggesting a possible lack of geniality on the part of the Duke

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de Beauchamps' family; but refrained, remembering how Matilda had won the very cream of Baltimore society by her alluring and gracious manner. There is something very good in the mother's blood, he thought, and discarded the De Beauchamps from his mind in order to attest the Travis loyalty and devotion.

"What you say is all perfectly true; but take your thoughts away from transatlantic considerations to dwell a moment on the relations that have existed between you and me for nearly four years."

Matilda sat a while in mute contemplation. There was no trace of an emotional conflict in her heart, only a momentary indecision of the mind, whether the glory of a great social triumph outweighed the price of a strong, enduring love. But the desire of youth, coupled with the inherited need of surpassing others, clinched Matilda's decision.

"It seems to me, now, that the two short weeks I have known Monsieur de Beauchamps embody years of association," she said, in that



“I did not know, I did not think you cared so much”

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quiet, thoughtful tone that was like a cruel blow demolishing all of poor Benedict's hopes.

"Then, you do not love me; you do not want even to learn to love me?" he asked, with faltering tones.

She lowered her head, and said, penitently,

"I regret that I cannot."

Travis walked to the window where, lifting the curtain, he saw the bright stars still shining. His heart was too full to speak. His deep sapphire eyes wore a look of wretched suffering. Matilda went to him and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"I am very, very sorry, Benedict. Please believe me that I am speaking the truth."

He turned and faced her again.

"Is there nothing I can do to alter your decision, before it is too late? Oh, Matilda, I have always loved you! I love you now, so intensely, so passionately; does this count for nothing with you?"

"You have been generous and kind. You will be good enough to forgive me. You

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will always hold an especial place in my affections. Is it asking too much of you to be present at the ceremony? It will be very quiet. It will take place in the Roman Catholic Church some time in April."

There was a chair near the window. Benedict dropped into it and covered his face with his hands. Matilda's eyes, regarding his deep dejection, glistened with tears. She dared not offer too keen sympathy.

"I am deeply grieved at the thought of giving you pain. I did not know, I did not think you cared so much," she said, sorrowfully.

Benedict recovered himself and rose. "It is my duty, now, to ask your forgiveness," he said, looking down into her moist eyes. "I did not think I could be so unmanned even by so great a disappointment. I will do all that you ask of me. To do your wishes in anything is my only compensation while you still remain with us."

Matilda, glad to see the return of his frank, sweet nature, gave him her hand again at parting:

"Think kindly of me," she said, "you have

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so strong and noble a heart. I will always hold you and Hélène as my best and truest friends."

Benedict walked out once more into the starry night. Its beauty held no more sway over him. He wanted to shroud his wounded spirit in the more merciful darkness. He walked to the nearest 'phone station and ordered his taxicab to take him to his lodgings.

Matilda went to her room with less than her usual buoyancy of spirit. She thought a long time before she fell asleep, feeling that she had crushed some sacred thing, that would rise again and assert itself far above her ruthless trampling.

CHAPTER XI

EFFECT OF MATILDA'S VICTORY

*"The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes — or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little Hour or two — is gone."*

MR. and Mrs. Dolliver were the first to be affected by the sudden turn in their daughter's career. The all-powerful head of the house had lent himself with noble effort to the winning of the prize for Matilda. He had left nothing undone that an able father could do. He had even held himself sufficiently aloof, that the natural disparities of manner between a duke and a merchant might not suggest themselves too harshly. Mr. Dolliver was filled with sound judgment. He weighed and considered every point of a possible venture with the keen perspicacity which had raised him, step by step,

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to the financial, and even social position he now enjoyed. The public, knowing him well, were unanimous in their verdict regarding this affair:

“ He is more than a magician, he is a genius! ”

The Del Bondios' equipage which was wholly at the Duc de Beauchamps' disposal, seemed to have transferred its interests from the Atwood to the Dolliver mansion. The two homes were in constant communication. Mr. and Mrs. Del Bondio, being elderly, though highly *recherchés* members of society, seldom entertained any but small companies. Entirely under the influence and hospitable consideration of their young relative, they acquiesced to his every desire that concerned Miss Dolliver. He wished to become closely acquainted with this young woman, choosing and creating every possible occasion to further his purpose. The kind Del Bondios fortunately had been prepossessed with Matilda from her very first entrance into Baltimore society. Small dinners and *soirées* were therefore given for the entertainment of Miss Matilda and her near friends; Hélène Doyle, Edith

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Hadley, Benedict Travis, and Dr. Rasburn were unvaryingly of the number chosen to form the selected company.

Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Dolliver returned these courtesies for their daughter; Ario being rarely in evidence, and Mrs. Dolliver presiding with gentle dignity. Thus, the friends grew into close companionship. Four months of almost daily intercourse was enough to cement the relations which the Duc de Beauchamps wished to establish with Matilda. It was little more than a week when the young Duke declared himself, conditionally, *bien entendu* upon the satisfactory result of the relative time he was to be in the city. These purposeful amenities continued four weeks before Monsieur de Beauchamps received his acceptance. Matilda had desired the interview with Benedict Travis before framing her final answer, delaying it till the end of February.

During this time, Benedict was enduring a life of humane, but cruel torture; and the miracle of it was that he enjoyed it. He never

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failed to put in an appearance, no matter what the time, day, or weather. He would have deemed it an act of cowardliness, unworthy of him, to have absented himself. For he gloried in his martyrdom like the saints of old whose exalted belief told them their sufferings were but the ante-chamber through which they made a speedy entrance into Heaven.

The difference between the two men from whom Matilda was making her choice was not fundamentally great. A duke, or earl, or prince derives his gentlemanliness from countless generations of ancestors. He knows no other life. From the beginning he has been taught and trained to it. But a man like Benedict Travis draws his chivalry and courtesy from the depths of his own large manhood, itself induced from like predecessors; from a heart actuated only by the highest and noblest impulses; from the air and soil of freedom which he is constantly breathing.

Benedict was not spending his days in chanting threnodies. On the contrary he concealed

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the true state of his feelings from every one, even from Hélène Doyle. He assumed, better to decoy his friends and his fellows, not Hélène's invincible, inimitable smile, but one closely resembling it. When these two met, their eyes looked into each others' and understood. He had not divulged Matilda's secret to her or any one else; but she knew it. Benedict's eyes were windows through which his very soul could be seen.

They had known each other since childhood. She watched his thoughts and feelings and met them in advance. She had learned to penetrate his innermost sensibilities. The smile with which she perpetually covered her own strong, impulsive, emotional nature was not the true Smile of the Sphinx; the smile that is unfathomable, unyielding of the cynical acumen with which it regards the flight of our frail human lives. Hélène's smile was one that she used to guard herself from trespassing upon the claims of others, in order that they might more conveniently and shamelessly disregard her own.

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How many of us, in this gay, joyous, sometimes heartless world, wear the Sphinx's smile to shield ourselves and our woes from its laughing eyes!

Matilda Dolliver was at this present time the symbolic figure of that laughing world. All the witchery of young womanhood was upon her; that soft roundness of limb and feature, the animated lustre of her eyes, the cameo-mould of her throat, the fair, delicate texture of her skin, the graceful droop of her auburn hair upon her temples. The silent charms that had paid tribute to her highborn suitor caused her to be idolized by all. The exultant state of her own mind acted like a contagion upon those around her. It was impossible to show any but good spirits in her presence. Benedict or H  l  ne would have been the last to fall back in the line of those who wished to proffer her happiness. The young Duke was becoming more and more enamoured.

After a period during which lively negotiations were carried on with the transatlantic home of the Beauchamps, in the shape of long, ex-

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planatory, eulogistic letters from the young Duke, replied to by cablegrams of unusual length, it was agreed between Monsieur le Duc de Beauchamps and Mr. Ario Emerson Dolliver that the Duke's engagement to the latter's daughter should be formally announced. A banquet was, therefore, given for the purpose, to which a selected number of guests were bidden. Owing to Mrs. Dolliver's delicate health, this affair and even the ceremony were to be extremely quiet and unobtrusive. Ario would have been charmed with the *éclat* of a stupendous marriage-feast. Matilda and the Duke, however, convinced him that tranquil proceedings would be far more *recherchés*.

So the time was fixed for the last day of February to make known the ducal *fiançailles*. The event transpired, and the news of it circulated far and wide. There were so few invited outside the prescribed coterie of friends, that a hum of murmured dissatisfaction was wafted among the many who had lavished entertainment and courtesies upon the young Duke.

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"This will never do, Robert," said old Mr. Del Bondio to his guest, with a twinkle in his eyes. "The society of Baltimore will be down on you if you ignore them completely for Miss Dolliver."

"*Sacre bleu*, I have forgotten them all!" cried the young man remorsefully. "I will do something 'great' for them, as you say here. I will give what my honored friend Dolliver calls a magnificent 'blow-out'! I like that expression; it has so round and cordial a sound, just like himself."

"I see you are profiting well by your sojourn in America, and falling easily into some of our choice Americanisms," smiled Mr. Del Bondio.

"I do it for the sake of the fair lady who has caused the astriction of my heart. I would that we were living in one of those halcyon periods of our history, that I might enthrone her not with a ducal, but a queenly crown!"

"You speak with the enthusiasm of youth and love; but love and youth are the indissoluble ties of the human heart. Love takes its place

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in the process of building the great structure of a human character. Yours is still to be formed, Robert, and I am glad to see it begin with this, the greatest of life's forces. You are justified, too, in your choice of the young woman. We have all learned to admire her; and I predict for her a fair future in your own country, where a good and beautiful woman is always a queen."

The young Duke glowed with the older man's praise of his *fiancée*. "You think my parents will not be disappointed with my foreign marriage? I have duly prepared them."

"They will approve all that you do. They have confidence in your good taste and judgment. I know their views. But to return to your obligation to this small social world, — what do you propose to do?"

"I would like to give a *grand diner de cérémonie* at the very best place your city commands — something corresponding to our 'Metropole' in Paris — and do like my large-hearted father-in-law elect, invite everybody without distinction."

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"You will surely reinstate yourself in their good graces, if you give them a big dinner at 'The Renan,'" approved the good-natured old gentleman.

"Renan, Renan? That sounds like a good French name. I will patronize the place."

"Fond as we Americans are of our democracy, there is nothing we prize more than any slight attention from the nobility across the water," averred old Mr. Del Bondio, in his whimsical way.

The arrangements were finally completed for the great dinner. Never was anything in Baltimore so desired, or so well attended by an anticipating public! The Duke of Beauchamps' munificence was lauded. His gracious hospitality was the talk of the entire assembly. True, the Dolliver prominence in the affair was a favorite topic among some. The Atwoods, for instance, who were at first incensed at the Duke's preference for Matilda, had finally moderated their feelings to an acceptance of the ducal dinner. They, nevertheless, made insidious remarks at

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opportunity, and partook of the choice viands with asperity.

The Hadley girls were consumed with gratitude at their inclusion. Sophie reached such a state of exhilaration that she related to her escort a bright remark of Ario Dolliver's, which he had made to a colleague he was entertaining at this same hotel.

"You see that man over there in full-dress suit? That 's the head-waiter here; he gets again as much salary as a United States Senator and gives ten times the satisfaction!"

Sophie's right-hand man agreed, as the dinner proceeded, that the man deserved his salary.

While every one seemed to be enjoying himself, there were some in the company who could not but feel that this princely entertainment was only the forecast of the Duke and Matilda's departure. Perhaps, the one in all the great company who most realized this fact, was Ario Dolliver himself. He who had toiled so unremittingly for the purpose he had just accomplished, was now feeling some of the pangs of vaulting ambition.

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That dazzling, beautiful creature whom he had raised to the highest point to which an ambitious society woman can attain, was soon to be taken away from him; a whole ocean's distance to be put between her and them! Like the ancient sculptor, he was loathe to part with his handiwork. He lay awake the better part of that night, ruminating strange thoughts in his, now, troubled mind. The next morning at breakfast when his wife asked him the cause of his restlessness, he merely said,

“Guess it must a' been something I et.” He would not afflict his Emmy with any of his apprehensive thoughts. His greatest anxiety was for the mother who watched all these appalling preparations with wide-eyed, ingenuous wonder. Benedict, who sometimes caught sight of Mrs. Dolliver's face in their various meetings, felt his heart go out to her in sympathy.

“She must feel something as I do,” he said to himself. “Yet for a mother—well, it is an overwhelming tragedy!”

The time of the conclusive event approached.

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The ceremony, as Matilda had told Travis, was to be exclusively quiet, owing to Mrs. Dolliver's tremulous condition. Again was the social world to be grievously thwarted. Yet every one's taste can hardly be consulted in affairs of this sort. Matilda, her family, the friends and associates, who were to perform for her the nuptial offices, went to the church in a few carriages. Monsieur le Duc de Beauchamps and his party did likewise. It took but one short hour for the high mass to be said, which transformed Matilda Dolliver into Mathilde, twenty-second Duchesse de Beauchamps.

If the newly wedded couple had not themselves been so radiant with joy, it might have seemed a sad wedding; so many among the few guests wore a sad heart! When they returned to the home, the festive atmosphere was partially regained. Matilda's presence was, alone, a restorative agent; for she was distractingly lovely in her bridal attire. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes lustrously dark and brilliant, for she had taken the master-step in the ascendancy of her much

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desired conquests. A remarkable attraction emanated from her; a magnetic influence of the mind, keen, sparkling, sometimes brilliant, always gracious. The men were all fascinated by her; a few women were devoted to her; her rivals detested her; every one was forced to admire her.

A few of her intimates, together with her father and mother, accompanied her to the ship's dock.

The brightness of her smile did not lessen as she parted from them all with fond farewells. When the boat's anchor was lifted, she still clung to the rail beside her noble liege to wave her kerchief to them as the ship sailed away to the grandeur and richness of the aristocratic Beauchamps estates. It seemed to the Atwood girls, who had likewise come to the launching, that Matilda was flaunting the flag of victory in their faces.

When they were quite out of sight, Hélène and Benedict came away together. Each one returned to his own home, with excruciating efforts to appear happy. Mrs. Doyle had not gone to the wharf, deeming it far too unpleasant

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an effort. When Hélène entered, her mother expressed herself in this manner:

“ Well, I am very glad it is all over, and I am immensely relieved.”

Hélène offered no comments but went straight to her room where she remained the rest of the day.

Benedict repaired to his lodgings, feeling that he needed a respite from human companionship. He spent the evening in solitude, grieving for Matilda like Hélène, who also was grieving for Matilda, but most of all for Benedict.

CHAPTER XII

MATILDA MEETS PREFERMENT IN THE FRENCH CAPITAL

*"And this I know; whether the one True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,
One flash of It within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright."*

PERHAPS it is not possible to describe, but better to imagine, the sensations of a young woman like Madame la Duchess de Beauchamps upon her first approach to the Old World from the New through the triumphal archway of a highly cultured Paris home. Not many American women reach that super-exalted pedestal of feminine achievement. Matilde de Beauchamps recognized her position and appreciated it. The reception she received from her husband's family far exceeded her most sanguine expectations, though sanguine hope was not one of Matilda Dolliver's temperamental qualifications. She had

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imbibed too freely from the main source of sound judgment in her family, to have been carried beyond her own practical good sense. Monsieur and Madame de Beauchamps bestowed a just share of their adoration for their son Robert upon the wife of his choice.

They belonged to that limited class of the French nobility that is above temptations of a vulgar nature. Their wealth, position and ancestral greatness of mind debarred them from aims such as are sometimes shown in international associations. Her husband's parents received Matilda with open arms, as their daughter. Before she had been in their home a week, they fell into the web of her fascinating presence.

"If we had had a daughter to be a companion to Robert, I could not have wished her more perfect than is Mathilde," said the elder Monsieur de Beauchamps.

"She fills all my heart's need of a wife for him," supplemented the Madame Mother, and breathed a long sigh of relief and complacency.

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Politically speaking, M. de Beauchamps had never entertained an undue ambition for his son Robert; this branch of the family was too far removed from the Orleanists or Bourbons; nor would he have wished his son to hold any juxtaposition with the grand-nephew of the great Napoleon, the magic of whose name and interwoven lineage would surround him with French and Russian allies. Quite the contrary, Robert was not born to rule. His native gentleness and studiousness would have unfitted him. He was far happier married to the educated daughter of an American King of Industry, whose mind was sympathetic enough to respond to his needs for study and research, than sitting upon any throne in Europe.

The De Beauchamps, as Robert had told his American friends the night of the Atwood ball, were radicalists in their views.

“It matters not who is at the head of our government,” Grandfather de Beauchamps used to say, “as long as it be a man of power, of self-

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mastery and efficiency, of prodigious energy, like the great Napoleon."

They rather leaned toward the Napoleonic faction, being admirers of the man and applauding the achievements which cause him to be recognized to-day as one of the greatest personalities in all history. They did not descend from warriors and conquerors, so much as from scholars; from men whose minds have left their impress on the art, church, history, and literature of the country.

Mathilde, coming as Robert's wife, seemed the crowning consummation of their latter days' happiness. Her delightfully fresh young nature was itself revealed in that atmosphere of inborn refinement and culture. She inwardly gloated over the richness and antiquity of its furnishings. In the Beauchamps' residence there were appointments of exquisite taste, dating back to the Middle Ages, marvellous carvings of the masters who have left their record in the delicate sculptures of French churches, marvellous and intricate tapestries from the weavers of Flanders. It seemed

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to have accumulated the artistic riches of the surrounding provinces.

One day, at breakfast, the young Duke, watching her enthusiasm over a *table de crédence* or serving table, of rare workmanship, laid his hand upon hers and said,

“You are perfectly contented, *mon ange*, are you not?”

She smiled radiantly at him.

“I needed not to have asked the idle question. I might have known by your perpetual expression of sunshine.”

“*Mon ami*, how could you distrust me!”

The French say “*mon ami*” as we say “my love,” “my own,” “my darling.” The crisp little utterance is the one term of endearment, the truest and best.

Matilda wrote home very frequently during these first days of new-found happiness. Her heart was so full of exulting joy. To her mother she wrote:

“You see, my dear mother, that I have not unlearned the lessons you taught me of being a

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dutiful daughter. My dear Robert's parents are heavenly kind to me. I hope they feel my gratitude and affection."

To Hélène, she said:

"The home of the people into whose family a kind fate has graciously brought me, is unlike any home I have ever seen. In Baltimore, I dare say, are perhaps the finest, most cultured homes of America. Yet, I know that none approaches this one. I recall nothing in Baltimore that suggests anything later than the Civil War, or in Boston, than the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.

"The French people certainly know the art of living well and wisely.

"My husband, I have discovered, has a strong predilection for natural science, a thing which during our brief courtship escaped me. He has a particular fondness for geology and his especial line of interest is glaciers. After taking his degrees at Saint-Cyr, he spent several summers in the glacier regions of Germany and Switzerland, making an extended study of the subject. When our first year of mutual acquaintance with

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each other is past — this is a custom in France — he will return to the study of his profession. We propose to spend the following Summer in Switzerland where he wishes to attain a greater knowledge of the Rhone Glacier.

“ In July we go to Normandy for the Summer. The Château de Beauchamps, they tell me, is an ideal spot to spend what Benedict would call ‘ the first Olympian joys of our married state.’ Remember me to him, and tell me how he fares, when you write.”

Paris in April and June is at its height of verdant freshness. The parks, boulevards, and avenues are sweet-scented with the myriads of blossoming trees. The Hôtel de Beauchamps, the winter residence of the family, was situated on the Avenue des Acacias, one of the favorite roadways of the rich and elegant, which faces the Bois de Boulogne and springs from the avenue of that name. When Matilda went from there to view the various attractions of the city, her swift *antomoteur* carried her past the most beautiful parts of that west end of Paris — past the Arc de

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Triomphe, where she thought of the great Napoleon, to whose undying glory it was erected, re-experiencing, perhaps, some of the emotions felt by the conqueror when, making his triumphal entry, he stood upon that eminence to dominate the city. Her victories and conquests were also just beginning. Down the Champs Elysées they flew, that triple esplanade where the fleeting tourists are followed by melodious choruses of songsters from the trees that gird its six sides. No wonder she felt she had reached the fields elysian and that her life henceforth promised to rise to Parnassian heights of perfection. Her husband, who sat beside her emulating the delights of the Greek hero when he sat beside his Helen, pointed out to her the elegant quarters of Paris where refined materialism abounds.

“We know,” he said, apologetically, “that in Paris virtue is not aggressive.”

“All the more credit to those who practise it,” returned Matilda. She was gazing at that pleasing but superficial aspect of the city.

“This is the quarter which, so M. Ernest Renan

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affirms, would make a good furnace wherein might be consumed that superfluity of life which is not occupied in Science, or absorbed in Philosophy!”

“Monsieur Renan is rather pitiless, is he not?” suggested Matilda. “That conclusive means might apply to other cities as well as Paris.”

“Feminine philanthropy always tempers your judgment to mercy, *belle duchesse*,” smiled Robert adoringly. “But I will conduct you past the great seats of learning where profound thinkers spend their precious days.”

He wished her to observe the Institut, the most glorious creation of the Revolution. He repeated to her what M. Renan says concerning it: “France alone has an institute where all the efforts of the human mind are, as it were, bound into one; where poet, philosopher, historian, the philologist, the critic, the mathematician, the astronomer, the geologist; all classes of thinkers can meet as colleagues and enjoy the stupendous result which great and single-minded men have conceived.”

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He was proud and happy to find her mind keen and responsive. He led her past the great municipal buildings, the Palais de l'Elysée, the Comédie, every structure that stamps Paris as the mistress and leader of all arts in the world. He visited with her the treasures of the Tuileries, where Matilda saw the far-famed Mona Lisa, whose marvellous smile Hélène Doyle's resembled. He wished to enlarge the scope of the knowledge she had gained merely through hearing or reading of Paris, by actual experience.

The month of June in Paris is not only the time of Nature's most perfect renewal, but it marks also the revival of social activities. In July every one of distinction performs the great exodus of going *en villégiature*. The young Duke wished his wife to be at her best when she appeared in that highly learned and aristocratic circle; and he was not disappointed. Matilda was received by society with the same enthusiastic demonstrations she had met from Monsieur de Duc's family. Her beauty and brilliancy; the natural refinement of manner, accentuated by the influence of

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the cultured De Beauchamps home, caused that amiable public to shower her with ovations. Hélène had acquainted her so thoroughly with French matters that she was able to converse with keen perception on all topics of interest.

The entire months of May and June were given up to festive entertainment of the young Duke and his beautiful bride. The persons who entertained them were not of the so-called society of Paris, the *dames du monde*, but of that distinguished circle of savants and thinkers from which the young Duke drew his friends. Some of the older ones were Academicians; others were young men who, like himself, were aspirants to that high mark of excellence. These persons and their wives, destined to share in the future renovation of French society, held such *salons* as were known in the days of Madame de Staël. Every one of them frequented the Comédie Française, and discussed the merit and charm of its actors at these reunions. Such things as the Concours Hippique, and other superficial amusements of the *monde-ordinaire*, were wholly disregarded.

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They had no time for the artificial joys of life. They were banded together to raise the standard of existence in Paris, and the world at large, as well as to follow out their own pleasurable interests.

The test was a severe one for a young woman like Matilda; but she stood it well, and came out as usual, in the ascendant. Robert, having well convinced himself of his wife's remarkable adaptability, felt that they could now repair to the restful solitude of the *château* in Normandy. He said to himself.

"She is in such admirable accord with us and our movements that she will welcome the seclusion. The dear child, I wonder if she has felt the emotional qualms that have stirred my breast! The change to a more uneventful life will do her good."

As for Matilda, when the time came for them to leave the city, she confided to her husband, as they rolled away in their closed car to the Gare du Nord, all her impressions of what the life in Paris had been to her. She concluded by quot-

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ing to him, in French, Sainte-Beuve's loving ascription:

"O Paris! It is with thee that life is sweet to live; it is with thee, and for thee I wish to die!"

The young nobleman was delighted. "Now, I feel sure that our joint life will proceed in a concourse of sweet harmony!" he exclaimed. "I feared that our quiet, retired life would pall upon a gay young woman of the world, such as I found you to be in Baltimore."

"Yours is the life I prefer," said Matilda, and she spoke genuinely.

"It was the silent sympathy of our two natures that drew me to you with an invisible cord—to you, of all the fair young women gathered there that memorable night!

"Come, *mon ange*," he said, tenderly taking her arm, as they made their way to the *vagons de luxe* awaiting them.

Monsieur and Madame de Beauchamps followed them in, and they all started together in comfort and safety.

The Château de Beauchamps is situated some

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little distance from Nantes, whose cathedral spires, as well as the tower of St. Maclou, might have been seen from the north end of the *château* had not the dense wood surrounding it at this season of the year interposed. Few travellers or tourists penetrate into that mysteriously hidden *château* of Normandy, fortified and protected by the natural bulwarks of the country in times when there was every need to dread the invasion of the terrorists. A bend in the river, screened by a deep wood, led to an open glade by which one came in sight of a stately *château*, with rosy brick walls faced with cream-tinted stone, and retired — as became the high-born beings who had found shelter there in troublous days. It was approached by a long, tortuous white path, boxed on either side with hedges of gnarled eglantine. In architecture it was a feudal *château*, embellished by Renaissance touches — high pointed towers and fair, slender turrets adorned with the rich blazonry of the French arms. Still more poetic and reminiscent of the days of French princesses and queens was its interior. The huge

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rooms, with colored glass or latticed windows, the vines climbing rampant about every niche and nook of its stone walls, gave one the impression of having dropped back several centuries to the time when peace or tumult were witnessed by those high, grim, and silent walls.

Robert always enjoyed this seeming lapse into past ages. His time at other seasons, ever since his Saint-Cyr days, had been occupied in strenuous mental and physical activity. This was a contrast to the drowsy somnolence to which he was willing to yield the full three months for the sake of the young wife whose diverse qualities of mind in themselves offered sufficient attraction to his explorative spirit.

“And yet you talk already of Lucerne for next Summer!” teased M. de Beauchamps the father, as they sat all together one evening, watching the rosy tints of the sunset playing on the water basins below. “It seems to me that you have chosen a cold science to couple with your first years of honeymooning, my Robert; are you not afraid to take this fair Mathilde with you, lest the

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frozen glacier strike her heart? Better leave her here with us. We will keep her heart warm with love," he added in a tone of badinage.

Matilda was sunk deep in a large *bergère*, smiling at their perpetual atticisms, and looking bewitchingly lovely.

"I am not at all alarmed or surprised, father, at your gallant consideration of my wife," said the young Duke, with a glance at Matilda. "But I shall need both her love and mine to melt that stern glacier into yielding me some of its secrets!"

"Next Summer is a whole year off," put in Madame Mother who did not like separations of the family. "You know we are always desolate when you leave us, and now Mathilde has come, it would be still worse to take her also!"

"Let us not worry ourselves with the future. Let come what may!" philosophized the elder M. de Beauchamps, rising to take Matilda upon his arm and show her the young swans and the curious fish of the mirroring lakes.

From the fair *château*, Matilda wrote many letters to her parents and the friends in Balti-

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more. She told them all the delights of this new abode, and enthused as they had never known her to do before. She was certainly showing the full development of womanhood. Her desires having all been fulfilled, she blossomed out like a glorious flower into loving tenderness to all. She was more yielding to the ardent young husband who was keenly alert to her every spoken or unspoken wish. She felt sometimes that, surrounded by all this adulation and kind protection, she would surely learn the way to loving him with the great absorbing passion he was constantly unfolding. In this Olympian state of human joys, we shall leave them, to follow the paths of those who were left sorrowing at home.

CHAPTER XIII

BENEDICT TURNS TO HÉLÈNE

*"Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows!"*

THE first few months after the Duke and Matilda's departure from Baltimore were rather dull ones for some of its deserted inhabitants. The advent of M. de Beauchamps, itself, was enough to raise the social scale of expectation far beyond its ordinary limitations; but his hasty courtship, all arrangements necessary for his marriage consummated within the space of less than five months, produced a correspondingly depressing dip of the balance. Fashionable people went away on their varied trips for the summer; in a measure, to work off the effect of the shock and hide their disappointment, chagrin, or vexation, as the case might be. The only ones

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who did not retire from the scene of action were the Dollivers, Benedict, and the Hadley girls.

Through the whole of that Summer, Mr. Dolliver felt the weight of his over-calculated aims. He suffered a lesser degree of depression, however, than his Emmy at home. His mind was so stocked with the active directorship of great business corporations that he might well lose sight of the low fluctuation of his sentimental basis. It was only when he returned to his home in the evening that the emptiness of the house struck him; the chill silence, the sadly beautiful objects that reflected Matilda's cultured tastes, which he had gradually learned to appreciate and enjoy. Mrs. Dolliver, whenever she greeted him, tried to assume a look of cheeriness. She was so glad to see him; the day had been so long without him!

"Well, how is it with you, little woman?" he would say.

"Everything has gone on about as usual. There is nothing much to come and stir us up these days," Mrs. Dolliver would reply resignedly.

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"Oh, yes, I did see Mr. Travis and Hélène Doyle going by in one of those new kind of motor-cars. They both saw me as they flew by, and smiled pleasantly."

"That was something kind of breezy, I should say. Any news from Matildy?"

"Nothing to-day."

They both sat through long silences. The husband, perhaps, would take up his paper, but listlessly, as if it no longer interested him. But Mrs. Dolliver did not like to be silent now when her husband was home. Her heart was so full of trouble. She could not stifle its hungry promptings when he was near, so much did she long for hopeful replies.

"It seems as if I'd never see Matilda again!" she said, with a plaintive sigh, on one of these occasions.

"Oh, yes, you will, Mommie dear," said Mr. Dolliver, looking up quickly from his paper, as if he had been expecting her words. "Matildy'll be coming home some time, and then won't there be a sensation? Gee whiz!"

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"She will never come without her husband; Robert would not let her go so far away without him."

"Well, then there'd be twice the sensation!" affirmed Mr. Dolliver.

"I couldn't help noticing them when they were here together. He acted as if he couldn't breathe away from her," said Emmy, with a little reminiscent smile that caused Ario to say,

"Just like us when we was lovers. My! don't it seem long ago?"

Emmy was still occupied with her own thoughts. She said wonderingly, "It may be years before they will want to come back. Matilda writes that she is so happy; that her husband's homes are more beautiful than any she has ever seen; that his parents treat her like a daughter, and seem very fond of her."

Mr. Dolliver sat a while with his chin lowered, resting upon his closed fist, in quiet contemplation. That remark of his wife's about Hélène Doyle and Benedict gave food to his sober study.

How fond he must have been of her, he thought

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to himself. And it had looked as if she favored him, too. If not, why had she let him come that night; and stay so long that every one was asleep, except them and James, when he left? If she had married him instead of the Duke, how pleasant it would have been now! Benedict had enough for a young man and he was getting richer every day. Besides, Matildy would have had more than plenty for both. It was the title that had fetched her; and he helped her to do it!

Notwithstanding these regretful reflections he could not help a slight thrill of pride when he thought of his daughter abroad; of her husband's fair estates, and all that she had acquired by her marriage.

"Now, my dear," he said aloud, "we mustn't feel so dismal about Tildy. It's all right that a girl should marry, 'specially a fine girl like her. The law of nature demands it. You'd have liked it better, I dare say, if she had ducked to some one here at home, like Benedict Travis; but she got what she wanted, and we've nothing to say as long as she's satisfied with the kind of husband

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she's got, a good man. Dukes ain't always such; but he's an exception — just clean picked out for Matildy."

Mr. Dolliver had that bracing hopefulness about him that never failed to touch those on whom it radiated, and on none more than the gentle Mrs. Dolliver. She felt the influence of his strong, bright nature, and cheered up at once, by preparing some little home entertainments for him; some pleasant friends to dinner; people who had known and loved Matilda, and who would join them in rehearsing her virtues, and sympathize with them in all her happiness and successes. Thus, they continued their luxurious, though lonely life through the summer days that followed.

Benedict Travis, like the honorable man that he was, tried to smother the barely opened bud of his young passion by spending much time with Hélène Doyle, who sympathized with him more than ever in his feelings for Matilda. They talked of her beauty and her charms; of how they had both learned to admire and to love her.

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Hélène had formed an affectionate regard for Matilda from the very first days of her tutorship of the modest, yet spirited girl who had come with perfect certitude into that hornet's nest of class distinction, the Pettingill School. Now, Matilda seemed to her like a beautiful plant that had grown and developed into rare beauty of mind and body under her nurturing.

Gradually they drifted into the ethics of sentiment. Hélène believed in life-long attachments, not sudden passions, as the proper basis for conjugal felicity.

"You would hardly call four years a sudden attachment?" questioned Benedict.

"I was referring to one of five months," replied Hélène.

"Oh!" said he, promptly jerked away from purely personal considerations. "Yet all the reports are highly favorable."

"It is always so during the first year of marriage, especially if one adds to it the glamour of novelty and noble connections."

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“Hélène, I don't like to think you hold pessimistic views regarding this affair.”

“Far from it; I am only looking at the realistically poetic side of it.”

“Realistic poetry!” cried the youth, his jocular humor tempered by interest. “What means that ingenious paradox?”

“Perhaps,” Hélène bantered, “you are too young to go deeply into the subject.”

“Too young! How much too young, pray?”

“Years,” with mock gravity.

There was something in her joking that he did not like, ready as he usually was to respond in kind. A moment he stared hard at her, then grumbled:

“I am well aware of the fact that you are years ahead of me in wisdom; one year of teaching, I presume, is worth five of knocking against the world.” His sarcasm left her unmoved.

“You'll be proposing to adopt me next.”

“Do you feel the need of a guardian?” brightly.

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"Not you," he soberly returned. "You hold a much dearer place in my estimation."

The smile suddenly left Hélène's face.

"I was only realizing," she said, serious now herself, "that a woman's mind is keener than a man's to ferret out possible results." All at once she leaned forward and brushed the back of his hand with her cool, smooth palm, once more smiling bravely into his intent eyes.

"It is sometimes a duty to forget, Benedict," she said. "You must occupy your mind with other things."

"But," he stubbornly persisted, "you believe that Matilda is happy?—that she always will be?"

Still smiling, her regard steadily met his. But she did not reply. Presently he drew a long breath and, in a lowered voice, said,

"You are right. You always are."

"I try to be," she sighed.

"You couldn't be anything else, Hélène," he fervently declared. "You're a trump!"

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Instantly her smile was transformed into the familiar occluding veil.

“The trump that wins the game?” she asked.

He fancied he detected a note of eagerness in the question, and he paused a second before replying, to wonder why. But he answered her with unmistakable sincerity.

“I truly hope so,” he said.

There was something always comforting and assuaging in a talk with Hélène, Benedict thought, as he walked away. Each time he went to see her, she quieted him and brought him back to that normal state of sweet companionship which had characterized their friendship long before Matilda had come between them as a forceful unit. Yet the vivid memory of the latter was so indelibly impressed upon his virgin sensibilities, that he could not wholly quell the flood of his recollections.

By the end of September he decided to take a short respite from daily duties. It was the glorious hunting season, when quail and pheasant

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abounded in the woods and thickets belonging to Willow Brook Farm. It would do him good, he said, to shoulder his hunter's rifle and sack, and tramp about with his dogs for eight or ten days, then rest at home another week or two. This would thoroughly fit him for work once more. He would announce his decision to the dear old folks by telegram, and spring upon them the next moment.

Major and Mrs. Travis, naturally, were transported with joy at this long-delayed visit.

"Diet is working too hard," said his father, pleating up the telegram into a genteel little fan.

"He ought to come home oftener to rest; he needs the change as much as other men who do strenuous mental labor," added Mrs. Travis.

"It isn't so much the strenuous labor in his case as it's the whirligig and sudden tumble of love affairs."

The mother was quickened by apprehension.

"Father Travis! What do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean that he was in love with that Dolliver

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girl; I could see it as plain as anything, when he was here at Christmas."

"Do you suppose he proposed to her and was *refused?*" gasped Mrs. Travis. The idea was too monstrous for belief. It were bad enough for Benedict to entertain an attachment for such a person; but that she should or even could spurn an offer from him! Her husband roused her.

"Oh, I won't go so far as to say that; but I knew he had it bad, from the way he evaded my inquiries." The major chuckled good-naturedly. "However that may be, he's been turned down anyway, for the Duke has flown off with Matilda."

"I am heartily glad of it!" said the resentful mother with a glare at the imaginary figure of any duke who could have the effrontery to thwart her son Benedict.

They did not have time to pursue the matter further, for at the same moment the object of their solicitude burst in at the front door.

Benedict allowed himself to be swayed in regard to his hunting time. His father assured him

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that the latter half of October was the choice time for bagging the best game. His mother said she did not understand how he could go from them so soon after arriving. So he decided to visit with them the first two weeks; and what great visiting times they had, surely enough, on those deep, vine-clad verandas at Willow Brook! He reassured his mother on the subject of her who had been Miss Dolliver, but was, now, the Duchess of Beauchamps; which duty was, to him, like the scourging of the old monks in their life of penitential expiation.

He confided to his father his secret desire to begin work upon a book he was planning on the subject of "Higher Jurisprudence."

"An ambitious title," mused his father.

"Too big for me to tackle, eh?" Benedict laughed. "Seriously, though, I have been tentatively mapping out something of the kind. All I want now is the material to be put into its pages. It seems as if I could n't get paper enough in my office to set down the stuff I want to write."

"Say it all, my boy, and some day you'll wake

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up to find yourself famous!" said Major Travis, glowing with approbation.

"It is not the glory of it that I'm after; it is the need of it. Some of our good lawyers are apt to be too well satisfied with a result that yields them a good round sum. We must do more than that; we must not stop, pay or no pay, till we have reached the point where law itself is dignified by its perfect maintenance. It is my purpose to make this an authoritative text-book; it will require years of looking up authorities. A man must devote the best part of his life to such a task. As I was saying to Hélène the other day, I want to feel when I leave this world that I have done something to make it better."

"A noble aim, my son, one that is worthy of your brave predecessors. Stick to it—you'll win!"

"You have done your share towards it, father; you have done more. You have staked your life to help preserve the civil rights of our government. There is little danger to personal discomfort in what I propose to do."

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“It makes no difference in what way we serve our country, my boy, just so we give to her the best there is in us.”

Thus the two weeks slipped by under the wholesome influence of his “good-soldier” of a father and the benign calm of nature’s own anodyne. He walked for hours beside the crystal brook, skirted with whispering willows, and their mute appeals filled him with renewed hope and energy, a desire to achieve heights he had not thought of before.

The hunting days came all too soon; but he shouldered his sack and gun with the same craving for out-door life that had governed his boyhood. By the time he had compassed this round of purely physical gratification, the crunching of November leaves was heard under foot. The cutting east winds from the fields suggested his return to the city, where he looked forward to his work with a clear and eager welcome.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EPOCH-MARKING LETTER

*"For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet clay:
And with its all-obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd — 'Gently, Brother, gently, pray!'"*

LUCY! Lucy!"

Edith's palpitating shriek startled the Hadley household as effectively as an explosion. She had reeled against the wall where she stood clutching an open letter which the postman had just left. On the instant Lucy and Sophie were in the upper hall, peering over the banisters with white, scared faces.

Edith, however, immediately recovered herself. She ran lightly up the stairs, her face radiant, her eyes sparkling with joyous excitement. Noting these signs that the sudden outbreak had been occasioned by nothing of a

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calamitous nature, alarm gradually faded from the sisters' faces, to give place to mingled curiosity and resentment that their quiet should have been so outrageously shocked.

"I do know," Sophie gulped, for her heart was still thumping painfully, "that you'll be the death of me! What in the world's the matter?"

By this time Edith had joined them. She stood patting her breast and panting for breath, the other two impatiently urging her to satisfy their curiosity.

"Oh, girls!" gasped Edith. "The most amazing thing!—the most wonderful—"

"What are you talking about?" Lucy sharply demanded.

"I've got the most astounding, unheard-of news!"

"It must be good, then, if it's novel," opined Sophie.

"Well, it's something that will stir up this prosy family, if anything can," Edith began, trying desperately to compose herself.

Curiosity could no longer withstand the siege.

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“What is it? For goodness’ sake, tell us what has happened!” clamored the two eager voices.

“It’s a letter from Matilda!”

This announcement was so inadequate that Lucy and Sophie merely stared, and their puzzled silence had the effect of steadying Edith at once.

She went on: “She wants me to make her a visit for the whole winter—stay with them in that palatial home, go to the French grand opera, take singing lessons of the best teachers in Paris—oh, cracky!” She jumped up and down in overjoyed transport at the prospect.

“Sakes alive!” marvelled Sophie, round-eyed. “Where’s the money to come from, I’d like to know!”

“Sophie, Sophie,” Lucy impatiently reprimanded. “Let her tell it all. Don’t interrupt.”

Edith came suddenly to earth again.

“That’s all,” said she in her natural voice. “Isn’t it enough?”

Lucy suggested that the three retire to her room to read over the letter and hold a family

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consultation. "There will be so much to do to get ready," she said.

"Get ready!" Sophie cried. "You can't be thinking she is really going to *accept*?" But she suddenly realized that her objections were as ineffective as so many wax bullets, so she subsided.

"That is the first and most important question to consider," Edith interposed—"Can I go?"

"Why not?" queried Lucy in a tone designed to bring every possible obstacle to the front for immediate inspection. "Does Matilda say she will pay the travelling expenses?"

"She does n't mention how I am to get there. She says, 'Take one of the good Hamburg-American steamers from New York, sailing between the seventh and fifteenth of November. The trip is so much quicker, and thus you will escape much of the discomfort of seasickness.' I wish she had asked me earlier, I'm almost afraid to cross in November!"

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," inter-

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posed Sophie. "I suppose *I'll* have to skimp some more; but for the life of me, I don't see how I can skimp any skimpier than I'm skimping now."

"No one need worry about anything," said hopeful Lucy. "An offer like that does not come to a girl more than once in a lifetime. The means will be provided." Whereupon Edith flung her arms about her sister.

Sophie could no longer withstand the infection of their eagerness; her pessimistic view of the matter swung to the opposite extreme, and she became more enthusiastic, if that were possible, than either of the other two.

Said she: "Just think how mother would rejoice if she could only know that at last her darling baby's hope of going to Europe to study was about to be fulfilled!" And, melted by the recollection, she added: "I'm going to help raise the money. I'll pack up those two poems and that old story 'Aunt Eleanor's Mission' to-day; I'll send them to the 'Home, Sweet Home' magazine, and see what comes back."

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"That is kind and thoughtful of you, dear," said the gentle Lucy. Edith embraced her other sister, also, though with almost certain doubt of the result of her good intention.

"Now, what shall we do first?"

"You, Sophie, go and attend to your manuscripts. Edith, gather all the best clothes which you are likely to need."

"Regardless of ownership," from Sophie, as she flew down-stairs, the entire responsibility of preparation weighing heavily upon her shoulders.

"You'll need a steamer trunk," Lucy tried to enumerate; "your big school trunk is perfectly good. Oh, such a lot of things you ought to have, and hardly more than a week to get ready!"

"I am perfectly overcome," said Edith. Tears came to her eyes, and there was a little break in her voice.

"Lie down there on the couch, Deedie; it is the sudden surprise. Don't think of anything for a few minutes. Try to sleep; that's a dear.

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I'll attend to your things for you. I'll arrange everything. I am so glad you are going!"

It created a very great sensation in this simple home of the Hadleys. Everything had to be turned upside down to get the child comfortably, and suitably "off."

"The necessary money, of course, is the main point," whispered Lucy when Sophie returned to take part in the consultation, for Edith had by this time fallen asleep.

"Perhaps Hélène can offer some way of procuring it," said the eldest Hadley girl, "she's always so ready and correct in her advice to people. She ought to have been a lawyer and gone into partnership with Benedict. You know, I've just been thinking that perhaps he would advance the funds. I'd just as lief ask him myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't for the world!" returned timid Lucy. "I would rather borrow it of some one in a regular business-like manner and pay interest."

"That's just like you, honey-bee; always so

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sensible and methodical. If only my literary efforts materialize, I'll be able to reimburse the whole wad!"

"Let us hope and pray," replied Lucy, but not in a very hopeful tone. Sophie's literary endeavors had long since passed from the hopeful stage—through the process of rejection.

"It's come to me very forcibly," pursued Sophie, "that we can't afford to let such an opportunity slip by in our family. Just think what it might do for her! She is just the one to make the venture; she's the best looking; she may make a splendid match over there, and marry a marquis or a count or some such grandee."

"Nonsense!" said Lucy, smothering a laugh. "I will be satisfied if she comes home with a much improved voice and takes her place among the *artistes* of Baltimore."

"Well, I suppose that's more likely, and more in keeping with our station in life."

The two girls went on whispering for nearly an hour, when finally Edith opened her eyes.

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“What has happened?” she said, rising and looking a little dazed.

“Just think a minute, and you’ll know,” said Sophie, with a significant smile.

“Don’t stop to think too long, anybody,” admonished Lucy. “We would do better to ‘get busy,’ as you slangy people say.”

The next day they considered a plan for obtaining domestic help during these eventful ten days. A kindly neighbor who had heard of their sudden windfall recommended a young girl she knew, who would save them untold steps, and was very reasonable in her charges. “She is a light-colored person about seventeen or eighteen years old, but quite presentable and capable. Her name is Lottie Medella.”

“She’s just the sort of girl we need. We’ll engage her at once,” decided Sophie.

“She will be such a help to me,” said Lucy. “I could tell her about the meals, and she might go ahead with them; while we devote ourselves entirely to Edith’s preparation.”

“Everything seems to point propitiously to

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my going, does it not, dears?" said Edith, hopefully.

"Why should it not, dear? You have always been faithful to your responsibilities; you are amiable and agreeable; sweet in your manner. And you always make friends wherever you go with your pretty voice." Lucy was expressing her sincere and loyal sentiments toward her little sister.

"That's a dig for me," remarked Sophie. "But *I* don't mind. I suppose I'll never be anything but a blunderbus. Still, if my poems and things don't come up to the top-notch of excellence required by the 'Home, Sweet Home' monthly, I'll start in on a calendar — that's a good hard sort of 'picking and stealing' business not exactly approved of by our Catechism, but remunerative and safe, like grafting."

The paragon of assistance appeared in the shape of Lottie Medella, who appeared eager to take hold at once.

A spirit of willingness is always encouraging, so Lucy showed her where everything was, and

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told her what to prepare for dinner, leaving her with a sense of comfort and affluence which was quite new to the Hadley home-maker.

“That’s right, Miss Lucy; just you go ’way and leave me be. I’ll get up the finest dinner ever you tasted. I kin cook, I kin!”

Lucy obeyed orders, and went right upstairs to report.

“I think she is going to do very well. She says she can cook, and that is a great relief.”

The girls all busied themselves with their various tasks; Edith was sorting out her wardrobe, Sophie was polishing and renovating all of Edith’s boot-ware, while Lucy was writing a note to Hélène Doyle. Every now and then, strains of melodious music coupled with the clashing of tin-pans and dishes, floated up to them from the kitchen.

“That sounds hopeful,” said Sophie, as she was giving a slender patent-leather vamp a final rub. “We are getting on so well, perhaps Deedie and I can go out this afternoon to hunt up steamer trunks and rugs.”

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"That would be a good idea," assented Lucy, addressing and sealing her letter. "You might also look around for some of those dear little motoring-hats, such as Hélène has. They wear them so much on deck now-a-days, and with the veil attached, one is well protected from wind and spray."

"Edith would look too cute for anything in one. Her hair is so fluffy and curly, she'd look pretty with nothing on her head; but she'd be more comfortable this time of year with a bonnet. She would look just coy," was Sophie's flattering opinion.

They sat down to a very satisfactory dinner. Lottie Medella had proved true to her word. Everything was well-seasoned and cooked to perfection.

"What a comfort it is to sit down to a good meal that Lucy hasn't been stewing over," declared Sophie.

"I don't see why you don't keep Lottie after I am gone. You might as well," proposed Edith; for knowing in what regal style she was

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going to spend the winter, her sisterly conscience prompted the suggestion.

“Well, we’ll see how she pans out, first,” was Sophie’s unintentionally punning remark.

“Yes,” agreed Lucy, “your not being here will mean less to do, too. We might as well go on practising economy, any way till the money we will have to borrow is paid back.”

The two girls went out for the afternoon, and Lucy busied herself with the thousand and one things that are to be done before taking a journey abroad. In her various perigrinations, she crossed the kitchen several times and once stopped to rest and listen to the dusky Medella’s talk while she was drying the dishes. It was something Lottie “did want to tell her so bad.”

“What is it?” asked Lucy with fatal show of interest.

“Well, Mis’ Lucy, it’s something I ca’ant make out, ’cause it looks to me kind o’ umpossible. That Mis’ Mannin’ I told you about, she had that old girl who used to drop in now and then to see her old Missis. Well, she used to

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tell me the most fearful yarns! She tole me she was just thirty-six years old, and said as how she'd worked fo'teen years at Mis' Brown's, and twenty-two years at Mis' Sellers, and another twelve years at old Mr. Tucker's who was a widier. Now how kin that be, Mis' Lucy? She'd been working out forty-eight years and she was only thirty-six!"

"She must have been prevaricating," said Lucy, looking shocked.

"Well, another time she came in while I was entertainin' three gen'lemen callers one Sunday afternoon, while Mis' Mannin' was at the cemetery puttin' flowers on Mr. Mannin's grave. I says,—'cause I thought I must interjuce her when she sat right down in my kitchen, finding Mis' Mannin' was out,—''Mirandy, this is Mr. Johnson, from Washington.'

"'How de do, Mr. Johnson, I'm mighty glad to know you! You say you'se from Washington? It's a wonder I never met you befo'. I was bawn in Washington!'

"Then when she came to Mr. Brown,—he

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was from Atlanta—she says to him: ‘Why, Mr. Brown, I’m powerful glad to meet you. And you say you ’se from Atlanta! Now, ain’t that funny, I know Atlanta like my pocket; I was bawn there myself!’

“The last one was Mr. Jones. I thinks to myself, now I wonder if she’ll sing that same song to him! He came from way down in New O’leans.

“‘Mr. Jones!’ she says, tickled as kin be, ‘Why, I’m deelighted to meet you. I spent most my childhood in New O’leans! Bless me, I was bawn in that there city!’

“She was bawn in three different places! Did you ever hear the beat of that, Mis’ Lucy?”

So Lottie Medella proved a source of amusement as well as a comfort.

They progressed rapidly for several days when one morning the door bell rang and a messenger boy brought a sealed letter addressed to Miss Edith S. Hadley.

“It’s from Willow Brook,” she said, as she tore open the envelope. In it she found a little

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note from Major and Mrs. Travis in which they united in wishing her all kinds of successes in her visit and study abroad; and lying within its tiny folds, was a correspondingly small strip of paper,—a check for three hundred dollars!

“Oh!” cried the three girls in a chorus.

“It’s all Benedict’s doings!” said Sophie. “He goes to see Hélène every day, and she’s put a flea in his ear.”

Lucy said with pardonable pride, “Didn’t I tell you there was no need to worry, that the means were always provided?”

Edith felt that this concatenation of fortuitous surprises held some deeply prophetic meaning for her. Her girlish ideas took fantastic flights before she said,

“What shall I do to show them my appreciation?”

“Sit right down and write your acknowledgment of the gift in graceful and grateful terms,” said Lucy.

“And don’t spell ‘grateful,’ g-r-e-a-t,” warned Sophie.

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This substantial interest on the part of the Travis family hastened the preparations and sped the departure. Little Edith finally sailed away, accompanied to the ship by her two sisters and her best friends. There were no tears shed on either side. Every one wore a smiling, happy countenance as they wished her a *bon voyage*.

CHAPTER XV

HÉLÈNE STEERS THE CRAFT INTO MORE PEACEFUL WATERS

*"Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one knows;
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a Garden by the Water blows."*

NOW that Edith Hadley had sailed Parisward, Benedict refrained from frequent visits to her home for several reasons,—first, because she was undoubtedly the most attractive element there, from a young man's point of view, and also because he knew that her weekly letters would be redolent with accounts of the Duc de Beauchamps' home and of the one being whom he was trying to forget.

Besides, it was not so much amusement which he sought, now, as sympathetic diversion of

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thought. Hélène offered him this more than any other woman of his acquaintance. When his mind was not occupied with its most absorbing topic, his contemplated book, he formed the habit of thinking, during his hours of leisure and solitude, no longer of Matilda, but of Hélène Doyle. It was not without a struggle that he trained himself to reject the one from his mind and admit the other. For he claimed, after much inspection of his own inner self, that the will can be subdued and governed as surely as the other component faculties of the intellect, if the desire to accomplish it be sufficiently earnest and persistent.

What a friend she had been to him, espousing his every cause, approving and inciting his successes, condoning and extending the hand of fellowship in his rare defeats! Truly, if she had been a sister, she could not have stood in more perfect accord with him.

But there his sentiments toward her stopped bluntly. The feelings he had experienced for Matilda were so immeasurably different. He

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had never caught the slightest proof of H  l  ne's emotional nature. Her attitude toward him had always been reserved, though friendly; yet her friendliness sometimes made one doubt the exact location of her heart; it seemed so entangled within the delicate meshes of her mind. Side by side with that other personality, aglow with the warmth of life and ardent love, when she had found the one who could kindle it, H  l  ne stood like a pleasing but cold statue. He felt he could not approach her with words of love. It was better so for him; there would come no violent emotion between them to disturb the even current of his all-engrossing themes for his work. He had yet to learn that a heart, noble and sensitive like H  l  ne's, reveals itself only with reserve. He was satisfied to let their purely platonic friendship remain unchanged.

During the following Winter, society in Baltimore kept up its regular ping-pong of social intercourse with a remarkable degree of symmetrical platitudes. The daily newspapers took particular pains to report, with acrid joy, the

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movements of the now well-known town celebrities, the Duke and Duchess of Beauchamps. All members of society read of them avidly and marvelled.

Hélène and Benedict partook rarely of any social pleasures. They seemed to have suddenly discovered other modes of entertainment. The fact was duly commented upon. Mrs. Doyle did not quite know whether or not she approved of this seclusion.

“People are beginning to talk about it; they say you and Benedict ought to be engaged if you are not already. I don’t know what to say about it!” protested the ignored mother who was governed by the “what they say’s” of the community.

“It must be emphatically denied,” was Hélène’s reply, “for there is no truth in it.”

“In that case, I’m not at all surprised that people talk. I suppose they wonder, as I do, what in the world he means by coming here three or four evenings a week, and accompanying you whenever you do go out to any function,

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if you are not engaged. What do you talk about, pray?—not of her, I hope?”

“Sometimes of Matilda, and sometimes of other things. There are many subjects, mother, upon which two persons as intimately associated as Benedict and I have been, can talk with interest rather than discuss friends, their virtues, and their faults, as well as their idiosyncrasies.”

“There you go again! It always seems, Hélène, that when you talk with me your words are couched in reproach. *He* is the one you should reproach, not your mother!”

“It was not spoken in that spirit. You should not take my words to yourself. You know that I have no other thought than your happiness and well-being. Have I not tried to prove it, mother?”

“Yes, yes, of course, you have; but it vexes me to think of Benedict coming here night after night, when you tell me he never broaches the subject of an engagement. I’m afraid you don’t encourage him enough.”

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was she who had understood. The perfect *entente* between them had not been mutual.

Even now, when he came to spend the evening with her, it was nearly always with the forbidden subject that their conversation began. It was then that Hélène, with the heroism of imminent danger, and the instinctive reticence of a highly sensitive nature, had uttered the daily prayer: "I will be strong, I will be just, I will be firm." For she earnestly believed that by this means alone each one of us must work out his own redemption. The weak habit of crying or evincing by word or look the sore need of sympathy, lessens more and more one's power of resistance.

It was this trait in Benedict which she most admired. Defeat is hard to the habitually successful; but he was bearing his with manly fortitude. An appeal to his keen sense of propriety and his strong character having failed, she tried by the subtle weapon of extreme intimacy to divert his mind into other channels of deepest interest to himself. He began, little by

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little, to unfold to her his project for his great book. When she succeeded in eliciting from him all the aspirations of his earnest desire, she saw him again as he was in the days of his boy's enthusiasm; the words fell from his tongue with flowing fecundity, and his young spirit shone unclouded by any doubt.

It was then she grew nearest to him; her quick, receptive, and responsive nature acted like fuel to his inspiration and they would talk far into the night, heedless of time and the surrounding silence, while Mrs. Doyle slept and dreamed airy visions above the sound of their subdued voices.

That great mountain of emotional stolidity which she had erected against him was now her bulwark of defence. Yet, often in the night, after a long intercourse of thought with him, her subconscious thought would dwell upon their past associations. They were children once more, playing together in the Willow Brook meadows, enjoying like pleasures, calling each other by endearing names, welding the union of two hearts that can only be torn

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asunder by the inscrutable workings of destiny. Then the barrier of defence vanished, and life levelled itself into the smoothness of a gently undulating valley. She communed with him secretly in those quiet hours; she almost felt the responsive current of his thought. She knew and felt his daily actions. She pictured him in his home at Willow Brook, in his office, where she had visited him, in his apartments at Cheltenham Court, where he sometimes invited his coterie of near friends for a quiet game of bridge or a musical evening. His whole life and thoughts were reflected in her mind by the action of that keenest searchlight, intellectual sympathy.

She had felt the power of Matilda's beauty, on herself and on him. She knew what an admirer he was of that glowing index of youth and life; therefore she had laid down at the feet of Beauty, her claim of long association, and upon the Altar of Friendship.

Benedict had never given her a compliment referring to her personal appearance; she had never known of his expressing himself on the

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subject to any one else. They had become friends in childhood, grown up almost side by side, and taken each other for granted as one does the members of one's own family. Yet she would have sacrificed much of his mental commendation for one look of admiring tribute such as he had so liberally bestowed on Matilda.

Tell a plain, intellectual woman that she is pretty, or looks especially well in this or that costume or *coiffure*, and she will cherish the compliment above all other praise. Womankind, even the strongest, are susceptible to that peculiar form of luxury, personal admiration; even though they may dogmatize at length on the superiority of brain, talent, pedigree, whatever you will, over the mere hazardous gift of Beauty.

Hélène Doyle was not a plain woman; far from it. She was tall, of exquisite mould, delicate and distinguished; but her chief attraction lay in the unfailing brilliancy and keenness of her mind. As old M. Del Bondio had gallantly put it, she was the pearl, with no outward glow, but the soft lustre of intrinsic worth.

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The Winter waned, the meridional sun waxed warm again; Nature put forth her buds of life and laughter and

“All memory, sifting with Time’s gentle art,
Till He who guides the swallow’s wintry wing
Gives to our grief-winged love, as sure as Spring.”

Hélène and Benedict’s relations had been a subject of comment throughout the Winter. The return of Spring naturally created a spirit of expectancy among their friends, though none dared to broach the subject to either of them.

“Anything so persistent and assiduous as Benedict’s attentions to Hélène ought to ripen into a deeper affection,” said Lucy Hadley one day, as they were speaking of them.

“I think,” said Sophie, in a tone of some vexation, “that life has been too monotonously pleasant since Matilda and Edith have gone away. I wonder what will happen next!”

“Not the announcement of their engagement, I feel sure,” pursued Lucy in a positive tone which expressed finality.

“What makes you think so?” queried Sophie.

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“Because Benedict was too deeply in love with Matilda to engage himself so soon to any one, even to H  l  ne,” she explained after a moment’s reflection.

“That’s queer! How do you know he was so dead in love with Matilda? Did he ever tell you?”

“No. But I have an intuitive feeling that he was, from the way he always acted in her presence.”

“You sentimental midget! I don’t think he was so raving mad about her; if he had been he wouldn’t have found such a quick antidote in H  l  ne. I met him coming out of her house the other day, looking as chirp and smiling as you please. He asked about Edith and I said she was coming home in June.”

“That will be our next excitement, I suppose,” said Lucy.

“I don’t see much excitement about that, unless she comes back My Lady Somebody-or-other.”

“There is not the slightest intimation of any-

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thing of the kind. She's mentioned only receiving frequent letters from Elmer," said Lucy.

"That's a pity!" commiserated Sophie. "I'll have to sing her the song about 'Little Polly Perkins of Abbingdon Green':

'In six months she married, this hard heart-ed girl,
It was not a wicount and it was a n'earl.
It was not a baronet, but a shade or two wuss,
'T was a bow-legged conductor, on a two-penny bus!'

"Only in her case it'll not be 'a bow-legged conductor on a two-penny bus,' I hope. But perhaps it will be Saw-bones Elmer Rasburn!"

"I should not be at all surprised," said Lucy, disregarding her elder sister's flippant allusions to Edith's matrimonial prospects. "I will be so glad to see her, that I will rejoice in the fact that she still belongs to us, and to no one else yet."

"So will I!" came emphatically from Sophie. "But I can't help having a little fun out of you two; you are so full of lovelornity! I suppose if Elmer walks off with Edith, somebody'll come along and carry you away!—that new friend of Benedict's, he calls the Philos-

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opher. I saw him making sheeps'-eyes at you when Benedict brought him to call the other evening; and I suppose I'll be left alone in my fading glory, like that foolish little Japanese idol of yours."

"Sophie, you do have the most ridiculous ideas! I presume it is owing to your imaginative mind. Why don't you write a novel and become a second Jane Austen? There is plenty of demand for a good, stirring one nowadays."

"I will," replied Sophie, "when I get sufficient material out of the experiences of my family."

One day during the last week of June, Edith Hadley returned from France. There was no one to meet her at the New York dock but young Dr. Rasburn, and she greeted him with a look of happiness, his being the first face from home. They had a long waiting session with the custom-house officers; she had brought home presents for every one, from herself as well as Matilda. Elmer told her she must be a stanch supporter of the high tariff, she had so many

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things “to declare,” — using the foreign term, — and seeming to take so much joy and animation in the performance.

Her sisters did not feel able to go and meet her, but they were just as glad to have her home again. Such glowing accounts as she gave them of her pleasures and achievements in Paris! She would have to do nothing but talk for a week, before she could give them the slightest impression of what her winter abroad had been to her!

Benedict and Hélène both came to see her; and to them she extolled Matilda and her husband and his parents, who were all joined in a conspiracy to load her with kindnesses, bounties, and attentions. Matilda was the same superb creature; but oh, so much more of a woman of the world.

“She has such an air of *savoir vivre*, and appears everywhere like a *grande dame*. When we went to the old cathedral on the Ile de la Cité on high-festival days, the fame of her beauty seemed to have preceded her even there.

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A great crowd of admirers were lined up on either side of the cathedral portals to watch her descend from her car. Monsieur le Duc acknowledged their respectful admiration by lifting his hat to them as we entered! I felt as if I were in the suite of a king and queen."

Edith told them how the Duke and Matilda were preparing to go direct from Paris to Lucerne that Summer, while M. and Mme. *mère* de Beauchamps would proceed to the beautiful *château* in Normandy, where the young couple would join them in October after their explorations of the Rhone Glacier.

"I was sorry I was not to get a glimpse of the picturesque old place, so filled with associations of feudal history, but Matilda said I should come again some time in the summer when they also would be there to show me its many beauties. They live a perfectly ideal life!" she went on. 'I never saw such complete harmony in any united family. M. de Beauchamps, *père*, has retained all the courtliness and chivalry of a feudal marquis, and Robert—he is the most

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faultless, the most devoted, in fact, the prince of lovers as a husband! I think Matilda is really falling in love with him. You know she used to say she was n't."

Benedict listened to these eulogistic accounts of his former rival in silence, his face an inscrutable mask. Héléne glanced quickly at him from time to time; but if her gentle urgings had not entirely banished the bitterness and disappointment from his heart and the barbed shaft from his pride, she had at least succeeded in teaching him to hide these feelings with eminent success—even from herself.

When they left the Hadleys that evening, however, he did not go in with Héléne, as usual. They parted with a pressure of the hand which he recognized as an assurance of her never failing sympathy. For her heart, too, was veiled—veiled by a wraith of such a smile as might have sat upon the lips of a sibyl.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. DOLLIVER WRITES A LETTER AND THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

*"Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
Abode his destin'd Hour, and went his way."*

IT'S about time I was writing to Matildy, Emmy, now you ain't so well; though you've kept up the correspondence in pretty lively fashion since she's been gone."

"Oh, yes, Ario, you do it. I long so to hear from her, — every day, if such a thing were possible. But my mind is so poor — my hand so weak — I feel that I could hardly hold a pen if I tried. You write to her — she'll be so pleased, and her husband, too."

Fired by his wife's stanch encouragement, Ario sat down to pen an epistle to Matilda.

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“I’m most afraid to begin,” he said. “I might make it so long she’d think it was like one of those long letters Paul used to write to the — what’s their names? — the ‘Ephians,’ is it?”

“Ephesians,” corrected Mrs. Dolliver, reverently. “No, it won’t; don’t be afraid. I would like so much to read it myself, when it is finished.”

He hesitated a little longer, just to get his bearings, and then went at it boldly.

“Dear Tildy: I ’spect you’ll be surprised to receive a letter from me. You know of old that I ain’t much for using fancified lang — ”

“Emmy, how do you spell the word ‘languidge’?”

“L-a-n-g-u-a-g-e,” said Mrs. Dolliver, smiling at his earnestness.

“That’s right! Just what I thought it was, only I wasn’t quite sure — ”

“The truth of the matter is your ma’s been poorly for some time and didn’t feel just like writing to-day; so I says, I will. [This here between the brackets, ain’t for her to hear. I’ll

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leave it out when I read the letter to her. She wants to hear it. But I'll just say to you, Tildy, I'm just stumped about your ma. Don't worry. I guess she'll come out all right after a bit.] As I was a-saying — ”

“ Emmy, is this right? ‘ As I was a-saying,’ when I’m a-writing? ”

“ I would n’t say it now. It’s a little soon at the beginning of your letter,” said Emmy, growing more interested. “ I would wait till nearer the end and write ‘ as I have already said.’ ”

He looked at his wife in rapt pleasure and surprise. “ I knew you’d give me the tip. You always have,” and proceeded with his arduous labors.

“ We got those neat sooveneers you sent by Edith Hadley. Your ma was mighty tickled to get hers, and my neckties is what you’d call *distantguy*. It makes me feel like I was a duke too, maybe.”

“ What are you writing that makes you smile so, Ario?” asked his wife, who was by this time in a mood to enjoy her impatience.

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“Never you mind, Mrs. D. I’ll read it to you if you’re awake when it’s done. It ’pears now like it would take all night to do it.”

“Guess you did n’t forget anybody from what I hear. That’s right. I’m proud to know my daughter can be Lady Bountiful if she wants to. Hélène is well and looks better than she did. Benedict keeps pretty steady company with her these days. Shouldn’t wonder if there’d be something doin’ in that quarter before long. Mrs. Doyle keeps up her everlasting tune of whining and complaining. Me and your ma took tea with the Hadley girls some weeks ago. Say, ain’t they a queer bunch, though! They’ve got a kind of female butler to their outfit now, since Edith’s come back from France. I ’spose they feel they must put on more luggs. This here butler is a colored girl. She hustles the grub, I tell you. Their soup and pastry factory is continually on the boom; a steady upward tendency, with no indication of a break. They served a good meal; your ma didn’t eat much; but she kept a-smiling and a-nodding to folks

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across the table, like she was having a mighty good time for her. She seemed particularly pleased with a business friend of Benedict's; a man older than him but enough like him to say he was his brother or cousin or something near related. They seem to be rattling good friends tho' Ben'dict's a young chap yet while the other's a man about forty-four or five. What pleased your ma was that he acted like he was playing sweet on Lucy. Everybody admires that girl; she's so sensible and practical! Edith and Rasburn are n't much account to anybody apart from each other. Nobody's seen hair nor hide of the Atwood females. It seems they coaxed Atwood to buy a place up in the Thousand Islands; nice neat distance to put between him and them. Good riddance to bad rubbish! Mebbe I haven't told all the news; but your poor ma's anxious to hear this read and I won't keep her waiting any longer. [Don't worry about her; if she gets worse, I'll send you a cable-grim.] So I guess I better quit.

Your affectionate

FATHER."

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"There now, Emmy, I'm through quicker 'n I thought. It isn't so bad after you once make a start."

"Yes, read it to me, Ario, read every word you said," Mrs. Dolliver urged raising her eyelids which had drooped during his hour of active silence.

He read his letter aloud with some slight defects in fluency, omitting the matter in brackets, of course, and Mrs. Dolliver pronounced it a fine newsy letter which would please Matilda and perhaps make her wish to visit her home before very long.

After his last visit to the Hadley home, Benedict virtuously eschewed all proximity to Edith and her sisters. He would not again place himself in a position to suffer and struggle as he had done that night. It was unconscionable, there was no sense in it. He continued diligently to discipline his own mind into thinking the thoughts he felt he must reach in order to have peace of mind to continue his undertaking of the great contract he had made with himself.

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The Summer waxed on into August. He visited H  l  ne now, not more assiduously, but more purposefully and less often. He felt the need of thoroughly acquainting himself with himself before making a decisive move. One night after he had spent some hours with her in dissecting the intricacies of Ethical Sentiments, it came to the point when Benedict asked himself whether H  l  ne, after all, would not fill the place in his empty life with comforting companionship. That other personality was still hanging over him. He had not fully recovered from his cruel disappointment. His need was pressing. Would not the better way be to dispel the haunting miasma, to speak to H  l  ne at once, and have done with it once for all? He had waited, it seemed, long enough. Was he destined to have his life spoiled? No; there were too many hopes luring him on in other pathways!

His mind was so alert with thinking that he had no desire to sleep when he reached his apartments. He walked the length of his two rooms, up and down, many times before bringing him-

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self to a decision. He had hung fire over it long enough. Yet he went over in his mind his last scene with Matilda. To this woman he was ready to yield his heart's best tribute. But she had turned coldly away from him, smiling the while, with tears in her eyes; whereas he had attributed to her, in his own exalted imagination, the emotion of a passionate, loving nature! The web that lay on his wounded heart was still of gossamer thinness.

He would think of each one in turn. First, *Hélène* would rise before him, æsthetic, exquisite, her mind filled with the idea of solving great ethical and sociological problems, her personality refined and attractive, her innumerable qualifications. All of these were pleasing to him; but he had yet to see the first attestation of her heart. It was impossible that she could be without a living, throbbing one; but she had never shown him the actual evidence of it. Perhaps it was meant for him to have but one brief glimpse of that garden of the gods! If so, he would give up the struggle and lay down his

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arms, as it were, surrendering to a great conqueror. There was no ignominy in such defeats. He said at last:

“I will ask Hélène.”

He went to bed after that, exhausted by the conflict with himself; but he felt that he had won, and slept peacefully the remainder of the night.

When he rose the next morning, a new vigor impelled him. It was as if he had cast off a long and tedious burden. A sense of new-found freedom caused him to breathe deeply and deliciously, as he sat down to his solitary breakfast. He threw a joke at his waiter; indeed, felt altogether jovial.

“I feel like a boy again,” he said to himself aloud. “Things taste better than usual this morning. I think I must hail Sambo directly after breakfast and spin out to Willow Brook. I can spend an hour or two with father and mother before seeing Hélène.”

Smiling in high good humor with the world, after reaching his decision, he took up the morn-

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ing paper. Almost his first glance was assaulted by a glaring heading:

ENTOMBED IN ICE

FROZEN STREAM TRAPS FRENCH

PEER IN WIFE'S PRESENCE

WAS ARDENT INVESTIGATOR

Duc de Beauchamps, Scion of

Notable Family, Vanishes

in Crevasse of Rhone

Glacier—Rescue

Attempts Fail

Benedict turned pale; he was faint; his hands grew icy cold. He beckoned to his waiter:

“Never mind the breakfast. I—I’m not feeling well.”

He grasped the paper, crunching it between his fingers.

“You suttently lookin’ powerful bad. Kin I do anything mo’ fo’ you, suh? Shall I call a docteh?”

“Thank you, Abe. I’ll be all right in a minute. Just fetch me a brandy and soda. I

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haven't been drinking either, you scoundrel; don't look at me like that. I need only a little punching up."

"That you do, suh," Abe heartily agreed. "A little cocktail would n't do you no harm, just naow. Oh, I know you ain't been drinking, Mr. Travis, but I ca'ant guess what's come over you so sudden!"

By this time the two had arrived at Benedict's room. He pointed to the door and uttered one word:

"Hustle!"

The darky flew downstairs. By the time he returned, Travis was sitting in an arm-chair looking considerably better. He swallowed the brandy and soda like a medicine and then said,

"Send up one of the bell boys, please, I'll run up to the office in a taxi this morning; I've got a pack of hard work there."

The boys and waiters at Cheltenham Court Apartment Hotel would have run their feet off in his slightest service.

"I will go down there," he said to himself.

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"I can always reason better at headquarters. I'll think what to do."

His trip to Willow Brook was given up. He clutched the paper that had changed his destiny, but did not read it. Once in his private office he would try to read it. And the thought that kept surging in his mind was,

"What shall I do? Matilda is free! Am I?"
and the word that came in answer was,
"No!"

He tried to divert his mind; for his temples were throbbing furiously. He tried to read the fatal, yet blessed paper; but his sensitiveness rebelled at any detail. The heading was enough. The day dragged wearily on. He went nowhere, fearing to meet any of his fellows who might wish to discuss the occurrence.

He slipped into his hotel late that evening, unobserved, to have another tussle with himself. He walked the floor again, hour after hour, till late into the night. When he awoke the next morning, it was with a very different feeling

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from the one he had experienced the previous morning. He looked care-worn and weary. He had made up his mind for the second time that he would be true to his word; that he would ask Hélène.

What should he say?

He did not know. Her inspiration would aid him. Before he had time to formulate his thoughts, he had reached her home. He pressed the bell-button, and entered almost immediately; the maid was dusting the library. In a moment Hélène was with him. His face which had almost re-assumed its usual bright cheeriness, was clouded and very serious when she looked up at him and took his hand.

“You have seen the report of the frightful accident?” she began, while they yet stood.

“I have—of course. But I didn’t come here to discuss that. I am here to ask you to marry me, Hélène.”

She caught her breath sharply, and dropped into a nearby chair, where she sat staring at him

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a little wildly. There followed a long pause, then she asked:

“When did you make up your mind to—to do me this honor?”

“What has that to do with it?” he returned, puzzled by both the question and her constrained behavior. “I wouldn’t ask you to marry me if I didn’t want you for my wife—would I, *Hélène*?”

She was again mistress of herself.

“I can imagine conditions under which you might feel an obligation to do so, *Benedict*,” she said with her old gentleness. “So I would like to know when you reached this decision.”

His own manner all at once altered.

“I know what you are thinking,” he said—“that I came to this resolve before seeing this news. That is true. But believe me, dear *Hélène*, that dreadful news has not altered my desire in the least. Will you marry me?”

She arose and came nearer to him, searching his eyes long and earnestly. At last—

“Do you love me?” she asked.

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"What a question! You know that I have always loved you."

"Yes, Benedict, you have always loved me"—the smile was more sphinx-like and mysterious than ever—"as a very dear friend, as a sister."

He grew suddenly ill at ease.

"Then—wh—why—" he began falteringly.

"But I will not become your wife, Benedict."

"What a selfish brute I am!" he blurted at last. "Here I am, thinking only of myself, without the slightest consideration for your own feelings. Fond of Matilda as you are, of course I should know what a shock the news must have been to you. Pardon me, *Hélène*."

"At the present moment," she returned in her quiet manner, "I am steeped in grief and sympathy for Matilda; I can think of nothing but her affliction."

"Dear *Hélène*!" fervently. "We'll let the matter rest for the present. Another time—"

"No," and at last she betrayed the slightest tremor of emotion. "I think it can never be."

He was submissive, unusually so, for he was

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heartily ashamed of the feeling of relief that her decision had given him. Yet he departed with an unfamiliar pang at his heart — regret, a sense of loss, a doubt as to whether he had really ever estimated Hélène at her true worth.

After all their years of intimacy, how well did he know her?

CHAPTER XVII

MATILDA RETURNS TO HER FATHER'S HOME

*"For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
Have drunk their Cup a round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest."*

THE great Rhone Glacier has its source between two high mountains, so dense that they are almost impenetrable. Descending from them with broadening banks, it tosses and flings about with gigantic force its pointed waves that have crystallized into pyramids and columns of glistening ice. At every turn and bend deep crevasses yawn, emitting hues of emerald green as the sun-shafts dart within their mysterious hollows. Cold, high-born, and exclusive like its surrounding mountains, it halts on its downward course where the sordid crowd gathers every year to view Thorwalden's eternal masterpiece. A

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small artificial lake surrounds the monument, hewn in the rock, presumably that no human hand shall tarnish the pedestal of its immortality. Here the glacier forms a cavern from which the torrent of the Rhone River, a cold, translucent stream, flows to overrun both Switzerland and France. This grotto is poetically described by Longfellow as "a gauntlet of ice which, centuries ago, Winter, the king of these mountains, threw down in defiance of the sun which, year by year, strives to lift it from the ground on the point of its glittering spear."

Lucerne, lying beneath it, where Matilda and her husband had gone, is itself a strikingly picturesque town. Set in an amphitheatre of mountains and low hills, it faces the snow fields of the Alps, while its approach is one of surpassing beauty. The Duke and Duchess of Beauchamps had chosen it this Summer in preference to the quiet *château* near Nantes, owing to the Duke's interest in the glacier. They had taken a secluded villa high up on the rugged mountain where Robert could easily walk across to the silent

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stream and roam at pleasure upon its surface, while Matilda, who sometimes accompanied him, would stand near its frozen brink to watch him step lightly from place to place, dodging the frequent crevasses with the skill and agility of one trained to the study of glaciers. A full retinue of attendants had preceded them, to put the elevated villa upon a footing suited to the needs and tastes of its noble occupants. Two or three of these attendants usually followed them on their glacier trips to provide food and other necessaries, in case the young Duke should find enough to interest him till nightfall. Like all earnest enthusiasts he lost sight of everything material, — food, rest, and time, — when absorbed in his mysterious calculations.

One day, late in August, when Matilda had wished to join her husband, more to check his unbridled ardor than from any great interest of her own, she stood near the edge of the river. From its banks a keener air blew, bringing the scent of forest tree-bark and wild shrubbery. Among the tangled verdure, the growth of some unknown

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mountain flower arrested her attention. She stooped to pluck it, and was so intent upon its study that she remained unconscious of the overpowering stillness about her for full twenty minutes. Suddenly she remembered the nearness of her husband; she was accustomed to his voice now and then, calling out some favorite password between them, or uttering a shrill bird-note whistle to reassure her. She stopped to listen a moment. There was nothing to indicate his presence. She looked upon the frowning glacier; but he was no where to be seen. Then she walked up some distance through the network of brier and brush to call aloud:

“Robert, Robert, *mon amie, viens-tu?*”

The echo of her own clear voice back from the dense woods on the opposite bank was the only sound she heard. Struck with a nameless dread, she walked up and down the deserted brink with repeated cries of, “Robert, my beloved, answer me!” She waited again, this time with beating heart. Only the moan of the bending forest-giants came to her ears.

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At length, she made her way with faltering steps toward the spot where the attendants were stationed. When they saw her returning alone and with a look of fright upon her face they ran to meet her.

“Madame is faint! One must go for her maid and return with all possible haste.”

They supported her until the maid arrived. With the woman’s skilled ministrations, they reached the villa where they laid her upon a couch to await the return of consciousness.

“Where is M. le Duc?” asked many voices, when the attendants had learned of the Duchess’ solitary return.

“Waste no time in idle questions,” cried the more self-possessed ones. “Down to the first hotel, some of you, for expert guides to search the mountain; a physician to attend Madame, quick! Monsieur has disappeared from the glacier; time is precious; it will take but a minute to save him, haste!”

Immediately the entire household went frantic in their attempts to institute a search. The look

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of terror and despair in Madame's eyes, when she recovered, made them realize there was no time to be lost. There were guides who knew the perils of the glacier regions. He might be found; although Matilda's speechless, stony stare could be interpreted into nothing but extreme danger. They rang special alarms to the city below, and it was not long before an eminent physician appeared on the scene.

"Your ladyship must compose herself," he said, taking her cold hand in his. "There is no immediate cause for alarm. You did not see him fall anywhere?"

"No; I turned away a few minutes; he was there walking on the ice. When I looked again, he was not!"

"Accidents of the kind you fear, rarely occur. There is every means of recovering one who has strayed in his path, even though he may have slipped in one of the crevasses. Many of these have a substratum but a score of feet below. One may easily be heard calling from that distance."

"I called him many times; he was so—so very

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near those frightful chasms!" she said, with bated breath.

"Even if he fell, he may still be found and rescued."

But the hollow echo of her own voice was the only sound destined ever to come back to her from the frozen river of death. Perhaps, generations hence, the body of her husband would be delivered from its icy sepulchre in the valley far below.

Next morning, when the report was brought to Matilda, who was now stunned to the realization that hope, with him, had vanished, the only question she asked was:

"Cannot even his person be recovered?"

And the man of science, with something of the glacier's relentless sternness, could only shake his head in wordless reply.

The Duchess of Beauchamps lowered her beautiful head in resignation, as the fair women of France had lowered theirs to the guillotine. Tearless, subdued, and humbled, even in the presence of her attendants, the sight of her moving silently about their home, was a heart-breaking

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spectacle. In the night, when she was left alone, she knelt at the window that overlooked her husband's sepulchre. What grief and remorse overwhelmed her! She who had once spurned a great love like the one she had just lost!

Was it the retributive act of her former ignorance? For she had been ignorant of the true meaning of a powerful love. She was just waking to the knowledge which Hélène Doyle had striven to teach her was the strongest of the world's forces. She had failed, no doubt, in her full and perfect application of it toward him; but when she thought of the many others who idolized him, of the world of science who would mourn him, she was baffled and confused into thinking herself the cause of the catastrophe. A deep sense of contrition smote her, that she should have brought grief to those who had shown her none but loving hospitality, and accepted her as one of their own! She felt she could willingly bear all the punishment she deserved. This great crisis flung back to her the vivid consciousness of her past heartless experience. She even welcomed

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the anguish she suffered as a means of atonement. Though she so severely condemned herself, she met no evidence that others shared her feelings in this self-accusation. On the contrary, those about her saw only the deepest devotion in her conduct.

As soon as the reports about his son were confirmed, M. de Beauchamps, *père*, came in person to escort Matilda to the old *château* in Normandy, where she might bear her sorrow in strict seclusion. There, perhaps, she might, in time, find solace, and the collyrium to her torn spirit. Surrounded by those who had loved and cherished him, who had included her in the tenderness they had lavished upon their son, she might learn to know that Youth's most deplorable wounds may be healed by Time's supreme elixir.

But Heaven willed it not so for Matilda; she had no sooner reached the place where she, now, most longed to be, than a much delayed and re-directed cablegram reached her. It was an urgent call from Mr. Dolliver, imploring her to come to her mother's bedside, for she was sink-

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ing rapidly. His hope was that Matilda might reach them before she closed her eyes forever.

This imperative summons, coming as it did in Matilda's deepest trouble, was the means of rousing her suddenly from all thoughts of self and present unhappy surroundings by being turned to those to whom she owed her life and all the good she had met in it. Setting aside their own fresh sorrow, M. and Mme. de Beauchamps now turned their attentions to their daughter's immediate departure. Under pressure of their redoubled affection for the wife of their son, they urged her to come back to them if her heart so dictated. They truly loved her, and were ready to stand by all that the sacred union between her and Robert required of them. Matilda found it very hard to part from them. Torn by her sense of duty to her own mother and to them, the separation became doubly painful. She bade them the most tender adieux, promised them an unfailing devotion and remembrance, and left them, a truly grieving and tearful young widow.

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The journey upon one of the swiftest of ocean greyhounds was not long. The young Duchess of Beauchamps was overwhelmed with sympathetic attentions and kindnesses, not only by those in her suite who accompanied her, but by the respectful few who knew and understood her trouble. During the five days' estrangement from a world of sorrow and pain, which was new to her, she had ample time to readjust her emotions after the two overpowering crises which had stirred and altered her life. Her heart and conscience were continually at variance. Her sensibilities were sharpened to a keener sense of what was required of her when she finally reached her home.

The frail, gentle Mrs. Dolliver having slowly succumbed to the wasting effects of brooding over her daughter's absence, had at last passed away. She died on the very day when the Duc de Beauchamps' irreparable loss was made known to all parts of the world, and thus she was saved what would have been a shock too rude to bear.

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Matilda's return to her father's home proclaimed to her the mission that heaven had destined to her younger, more promising strength. Her mother had already been laid to rest, and Ario Dolliver was a sadly broken man.

CHAPTER XVIII

MATILDA IS COMFORTED BY HER FRIENDS

*"A moment guess'd — then back behind the Fold
Immerst of Darkness round the drama roll'd
Which for the Pastime of Eternity
He doth Himself contrive, enact, behold!"*

HELENE DOYLE was among the first to see the Duchess of Beauchamps after return to Baltimore. In her office of true friend, H       had ministered to the beloved Mrs. Dolli-
ver through the days of her last, brief illness. She had tried to take the place of the absent daughter; and the fading mother had poured her words of loving separation for Matilda into H      's willing ears. It was natural that she should be the first to greet Matilda in her father's home upon her sad arrival. The two women exchanged many tears and words of loving sympathy before

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Matilda was able to meet her afflicted father. Hélène remained with them the first few days, to mollify the cruel change of environments for poor Matilda, as well as to cheer Ario Dolliver who, during the crisis of events, seemed to be robbed of his habitual fortitude. Then, she left them in their grief-stricken solitude to commune with each other; to strengthen the indissoluble tie that draws those of one family nearer together in a common sorrow.

The Autumn set in that year, gloomy and cold with the peculiarly mournful note of the season. Matilda and her father saw very few persons that Winter save Hélène Doyle and Edith Hadley, who were now *habituées* of the house. Mr. Dolliver resumed, in due time, his punctual regularity at his down-town office. His wealth, during his period of cessation of its observance, seemed to have taken a sudden, automatic leap, manifolding itself to such an extent that his presence was constantly necessary. He had no leisure to foster his poor bruised feelings. Like Ixion, he was bound to the wheel of toil.

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There was no doubt, however, that Matilda's being at home had a salutary effect upon her father's spirits. In spite of his deep sorrow at the loss of his beloved Emmy, his characteristic nature of downing the bad, and looking only to the good of life, gradually restored his beaming, good-natured view of all the blessings that remained to him. After some time, Matilda also began to realize that the world's tears, and secret sorrows of decadence, disappeared at the return of Spring's sunshine. For heaven is kind to us, even in our woes; in time the clouds disperse and we look up again to our lives of peace and joy. Hélène, who was a constant visitor, had spoken much of Benedict, and begged that he be allowed to see Matilda. He had been so deeply affected by her sorrow; but he did not know how she regarded him, and therefore had not ventured to come and express his sympathy in person.

Matilda was tearfully moved by the report.

"Tell him to come," she said. "How could he doubt that I would receive his sympathy! I told him, the last time we spoke intimately together,

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that I should ever count you and him, my best, my truest friends."

So H  l  ne came with Benedict, dutifully, submissively, yet proudly, as did the great chiefs of old, when they followed the triumphant cars of their conquerors. Fair, beautifully pathetic Matilda was so absorbed in her own sorrows and her great need of consolation, that she did not notice her friend's pallor, nor the tremulousness of the sensitive lips in the execution of her invincible, unrevealing smile.

It fell out very naturally that Benedict, having successfully renewed, continued his visits to Matilda — delicate attentions, fearing to trespass too soon upon her lacerated heart. He sought H  l  ne's society more than ever. With her he could open his heart and speak of his timorous desires, even find encouragement; but they never went again together to see Matilda. H  l  ne continued her offices of friend; Benedict pursued his silent, timid wooing, and they compared notes later in his morning visits to H  l  ne. This quiet, inoffensive state of affairs seemed to suit every

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one concerned. Ario Dolliver was grateful, because, as the evenings he must spend at his bureau of activity grew more frequent, it was a relief to know Matilda was pleasantly entertained at home.

Sophie Hadley and Mrs. Doyle were perhaps the only ones not wholly amenable to the new condition of things. Sophie complained:

“I don’t see why Benedict has to go flying off on a tangent, the minute Matilda gets back, when he’s been so assiduously devoting himself to Hélène for the past two years! One would think there was no other woman on earth but Matilda Dolliver.”

“You know very well, he was fond of Matilda from the day he first met her,” said Edith, who rather gloried in her friend’s conquests, as long as she had never shown any dangerous propensities in the Elmer Rasburn quarter.

“A young woman who has her head turned by social triumphs at home and abroad!” continued Sophie. “Why isn’t he satisfied with Hélène? Isn’t she good enough?”

“Hélène and he have never touched upon the

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subject of love-making," asserted Lucy, vindicatingly. "She as much as told me so. Their association, almost from childhood, has never been anything but pure and simple friendship; just a sisterly and brotherly attachment, that's all."

"He has never had a sister and she's never had a brother; how do they know it's that sort of an attachment? That's all bosh! I'll warrant you Mrs. Doyle does n't look upon it that way. I'll be willing to bet Hélène cares for him, anyway. Friendship, nothing! Besides, is n't friendship a good enough thing to marry on! I'd rather have it than sentimental rubbish; it's a more sure thing!"

"Don't get so excited over it," laughed Lucy. "One would think you wanted Benedict for yourself!"

"He's not to be sneezed at," acknowledged Sophie, in nowise abashed. "But it vexes me to think he'd be satisfied with a second-best. I hope he won't ask her to marry him, yet a while. She has hardly worn her widow's weeds a year; it would seem like rather indecent haste."

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“Don’t be so anxious about other people’s love-affairs,” piped up Edith, who now assumed the complacency of one whose prospects were settled.

“That’s quite right,” chimed in Lucy. “Let every one manage his own love affairs; and he or she will be satisfied, at least, even if their friends are not.”

Sophie approved of her sister’s wise remark; but made certain mental reservations as to the cause by which it was prompted.

“Well, I suppose she’ll get him, if she wants him,” she added. “Widows have a better chance than spinsters; they’ve had experience, and practice makes perfect.”

As to Mrs. Doyle, the mystery of her daughter’s relations with Benedict Travis kept her gentle bosom in a perpetual flutter of excitement and vain expectation.

All unconscious of these sentiments concerning him, Benedict was being drawn near and nearer to the object of his first great passion, by that most irresistible of forces, personal attraction. His great book, that had up to this time occupied

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his deepest interest, was temporarily laid aside to give place to the things that so vitally affected his heart. He thought constantly of Matilda as he saw her now, crushed and saddened by a double sorrow; and he yearned to be her comforter, to restore to her the beauty of happiness, and all the joys that had formed her halo of glory. So ardent was his desire to accomplish this that he felt hopeful of achievement.

He spoke of it with H  l  ne, as was his custom where he has something good to confide; and, as usual, she was sympathetically interested. He prefaced his confidences with an apology for his former heartless proposal, and digressed extensively on the wisdom of her refusal. But she would not now refuse to be his everlasting friend?

“I am glad you have of yourself come to realize the cause of my reply. How would you feel, now, if I had taken you at your word?”

“I should have tried to do my duty, as you helped me to do during the time when the Duchess of Beauchamps was beyond my reach.”

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The look of sincerity in his deep blue eyes, as he looked into hers, caused her to reply:

“ I was sure of it. As to friendship like ours, that is undying. Nothing can change it, nor destroy it. It holds its place in the eternal beauties of God’s universe!”

When Benedict sat alone in his bachelor quarters that night, he felt he wanted to commune seriously with himself after his morning interview with Hélène. The past two years had matured him beyond his age. He began to weigh life’s matters at their sterling value. He wanted to get down to the very *nuda veritas* of things common, and of daily occurrence. He tried to fancy his life side by side with Mr. Dolliver, that sober, honest, successful, but uncultured man. To satisfy his desire, he would have to *faire la vie en commun*. Matilda could not be separated from her father. That was a foregone conclusion. And that was where his enamoured reason halted.

While he was thus deliberating, Satan, in the form of Self-Gratification and Passionate Desire,

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came to him. He led him unto a very high mountain and tempted him.

“Behold the world! Its pleasures and desires fulfilled, its glories of power in achievements, in great wealth! Over all these will I give thee dominion, if thou wilt follow me.”

And Benedict, being only a human of the twentieth century, succumbed to the temptation. So treacherous are the wiles of the serpent, that he no sooner let him taste the highest pinnacle of human joy, than he prepared a doom to snatch him from it, and cast him for a time into confusion and despair. It was only the power for good which had sustained young Benedict throughout all his previous life, that caused him, finally, to rise above the fiery torrent and assert his true self; not only sanctified, but refined, chastened, and empowered like the archangels of creation.

When he reviewed his late deductions regarding his life in common with Mr. Dolliver, the temptor's voice whispered to him George Herbert's saintly words:—“Grudge not to pick out treasures from an earthen pot!” And the desire

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to trample every obstruction in his path, grew stronger, more determined.

In that same small room where their last interview had been held, where she had wrung tears from his strong heart, he came one day soon after, to see Matilda. In the glaring light of noonday, he thought he could control his emotions more surely, and sound more guardedly the depths of her bruised heart. How and when could he reopen his plea? He did not know. He was wiser, now, — he would bide his time. The bright daylight in which he saw her took away none of her charms. In her sadness and mourning, she was even more beautiful, if possible, but pathetically so. She was sitting on the long French *bergère* on which she had been reclining. The impress of her small head and the dark moisture of tears were upon the soft down pillow. His heart yearned to comfort her; yet it was she who opened the gateway of fulfilment to his desire by saying,

“I need so much to be comforted and loved! He taught me the joy, and the need of it.”

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Benedict bent tenderly over her.

“You once said that you thought you could learn to love me. Do you think you could do it, now? I will be so patient a teacher, I will try to teach you by loving, that there is no other lesson in life worth learning.”

It was then that Matilda covered her face with her hands and wept silently. Was it from remorse at the remembrance of what she had made him suffer? Or from regret for her life of past glories and triumphs, which she must relinquish forever if she gave herself to him? Who shall say?

Benedict was deeply moved by her tears. He made no sound or motion to disturb her. He sat mute, holding his cold hands tightly pressed together, till at length she was the first to speak.

“I will try to learn the lesson with so kind, so forgiving, a teacher. I think I might prove a more apt pupil, now.” A smile broke through her tears. “My experience has taught me the worth of what you offer.”

Benedict's heart gave a great leap. He could

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not speak for a few brief seconds. When he did, he said, extending his hand,

“Give me your hand as a pledge of your promise. I will not press you again against your inclinations. I will wait until you yourself are ready, if you will speak the word.”

She looked at him with glowing yet moist eyes.

“You taught me first to beg, and now you teach me how a beggar should be answered, like Portia, with Bassanio’s ring! Only think what a task you impose upon me! Is it in retribution for my former coldness and heartlessness?”

“Never!” he exclaimed, pressing the hand he still held. “My heart holds no rancor, but tenderness for you!”

She smiled at him sweetly, perhaps expectantly; but he remained undemonstrative, save in his words.

When he left her, it was with some new-found feeling in his being. He was not eager but humbled; resigned to await her bidding patiently, with more a sense of exalted spiritual joy than of satisfied human passion.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SMILE OF THE SPHINX: HÉLÈNE'S INTERPRE- TATION THEREOF

*" Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again;
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same Garden after me — in vain! "*

HELENE DOYLE was not one "to die of a rose in aromatic pain"! The Sphinx-smile is used by all people of the world. In the world the smile is various and manifold. We make use of it to clothe our diverse feelings: our affections, when not requited; our hatred and contempt of those who come periodically into our lives to smile and smirk, while nurturing a poisonous canker in their hearts; that of envy, jealousy, malice, and all uncharitableness. And yet these people pose before the world as good, kind, and amiable! They pretend to religion, alms-giving,

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even to love; but that love is tainted in the deadly chalice of inordinate selfishness! Persons whose flattery is venomous; who cannot tell a truth that stings for fear of losing a friend; who cannot prove by temperament or action that real love is patient, enduring, generous, though heart-breaking self-sacrifice; persons who protest against those who do, and criticise every deed of good intent.

Hélène was sincere. It was no wonder she held in disdain those whom she thus judged. But her smile was the ineffable smile that locked the bitter secret within the innermost recesses of her woman's heart. Her own strong, sweet nature she revealed with crystalline transparency to those whom she trusted and loved. Her sufferings, her disappointments, the infinite gnawing griefs that daily beset her, she did not disclose, lest by so doing she should give pain.

After Matilda's second marriage, which occurred late in the Fall of that year, she retired like the crustacean into the depths of its shell. Instead of the morning visits from Benedict, she received

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telephone calls from Matilda, begging her not to let the day pass without coming to see her.

“I am so happy, dear; you don’t know how grateful I am to you, to all the dear ones who have made it possible for me to look again into a world of joy!”

When H  l  ne was near her, Matilda opened her heart and spoke more freely than she had ever done.

“Benedict is an angel!” she said. “You don’t know the depth and strength and gentleness of his love!”

“I know his nature well,” said she, who had sounded every part and fibre of his character in her years of long communion with him; and she smiled a glorified smile when she thought resignedly, “That love was never meant for me!”

Matilda found endless comfort in being with H  l  ne; in rehearsing her past experience and her now restored condition of calm peacefulness. But H  l  ne could not but detect a plaintive note even in her expressions of joy. This may have resulted from the impression she herself was

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impelled to form. Hélène's spirit was during this period of her life saturated with the plaintiveness of those who have lost, for a time, the light of the sun, who grope alone through the chill, damp darkness of night, forgetting that the Sun of Righteous Love will again rise, to dispel the night shadows!

And what of Benedict, in his super-exalted state of human bliss! Life to him had completely changed its aspects. The words of the prophet came into his heart: "For, behold, . . . new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." At this particular stage of his career, his mind was alive with a deep spiritual sense of his new-born happiness. Daily his heart swelled by the flood of its healing stream, permeating every part of his being. His countenance, which had always mirrored the various prismatic lights of his sentient nature, seemed now transported beyond the limitations of ordinary human beings. Every one noticed it, his friends particularly.

Sophie Hadley, never slow to express her

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observations, broke into the house one day with this outburst:

“I never saw any one so improved by matrimony as Benedict! I met him spinning down in Father Dolliver’s — or rather Matilda’s — stunning new French car, and such an explosive beam of a smile I never saw on a man’s face!”

“I am afraid you have lost your wager,” said Lucy, as they sat together that evening on their small side veranda. It was one of the luxuries they enjoyed since Edith’s marriage; for after that event, Lottie Medella was installed in their establishment with the positive permanence of Lares and Penates.

“Lost my wager on what?” inquired Sophie, with the sweet, convenient oblivion of all past disputations.

“You said you would bet that Hélène was in love with Benedict.”

“I’m not sure she is n’t, even now,” contended Sophie. “I should think she might have been, in all the years he’s been hanging onto her apron strings!”

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“I used to think so, too,” Lucy went on, rather enjoying the topic, “but I don’t now.”

“Why not?” queried Sophie.

“Because H         appears so well satisfied with their marriage.”

“H         doesn’t make a moving picture show of her feelings; but there’s one thing I will bet on,” insisted Sophie, just for the sake of argument, “and that is that he proposed to her!”

“Oh, that is not possible!”

“Why not?”

“Because she would have accepted him. Almost any girl in Baltimore would have, if she’d had the chance,” concluded practical little Lucy Hadley.

“I know you’ve always thought Benedict was the only catch in town. Most any sighing spinster would, unless she was a fool.”

“Then, why did not H        ? You certainly don’t think she is a fool?”

“No, indeed; I admire her too much; she’s a very dainty, delicate, dapper little lady, as the ballad goes; only she’s not little. Maybe he of-

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Heavy snow clouds hung overhead; the atmosphere was gray and keen. She had been up late the night before, with problems of her own, and she was tired. The moment she stepped into the comfortable warmth of the luxurious home, a pleasurable sensation came over her. Mrs. Travis was in her own apartments, and would there receive Miss Doyle.

Hélène found Matilda clothed in a rich maternity gown of softest satin. She raised both arms to embrace Hélène, and excused herself, on the plea that she was a little weary this morning.

“Oh, I am perfectly well; I have been all through; but my time is growing very near. I have been passing a review of all the dear little articles of the tiny wardrobe. They appeal so strongly to me. I wanted you to see them with me. I felt you must help me to be brave. I am very hopeful, very happy; but I have a strange dread of the *accouchement*! The ladies in France make nothing of it. My Mother Beauchamps has sent me the most beautiful letters of felicitation and encouragement, which I read every day; but

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I want you, H  l  ne, near me, very near me, when my time comes!"

H  l  ne was struck by the vivacity of her mood, the rapidity of her words, and the quick succession of her phrases, as she spoke to her.

"You have no cause for alarm," comforted H  l  ne. "You will have the best skill that the country affords; you must be your bright, sweet, happy self to the end, not only for your own sake, but for Benedict's."

Matilda had been steeped in thought at H  l  ne's opening words, remembering how they had tried to prevent alarm when there was every cause for it, but when H  l  ne spoke of Benedict, quick as a lightning flash, she seized her arm, and cried:

"You would have him exempt from every trial?"

"Of course, I would; and you, as well, and the precious little soul whose life depends on your well-being. Calm yourself; you must not give way to any but hopeful thoughts!" and the gentle pressure of H  l  ne's cool hand quieted her.

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“ You said you wished to show me that fascinating little trousseau.”

Matilda smiled gloriously, and led the way to the next room. They handled every trifle that was to swathe the new-born babe. Then Matilda sat down near the beruffled, beribboned little basket where she had laid the smaller treasures. She seemed to gloat over the sight. Finally she turned again to Hélène and breathed a long sigh of relief.

“ I am, indeed, very, very happy; and I feel so much better about everything since you came!” She gazed intently into the eyes of her friend; so much so, that she did not notice the pearly tears trembling on her lashes, nor the cold moisture of the delicate fingers she was pressing. “ Promise me that you will be very near; that you will come to me at any moment if I need you; and if — if I should not get well, that you will take my little one, and mother it as if it were your own! Give me your loyal word that you will do this for me — if I should pass into the dark valley!”

This plea from Matilda Dolliver, who had

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been the recipient of Heaven's most gracious favors, to Hélène Doyle, who had been deprived of so much, sent an icy current around her throbbing heart.

"Cease from holding such thoughts, Matilda; how can you do it when you have just acknowledged that you were happy? How can happiness or love entertain such fears? You who have been blessed far beyond the lot of other women! Do you not think of Benedict, your husband; Benedict, the crowning blessing of your life!" Hélène's sensitive lips quivered as she uttered the words without a smile; but a sadly reproachful look came into her deep gray eyes. Matilda stared at her a moment; a strange light came into her own eyes; perhaps the awakening of maternal intuition. She flung both arms about Hélène's shoulders, crying, convulsively,

"My dear, dear friend! I see it, now, the secret you have been hiding so long, so well, from us all. *Ah, mon dieu, mon dieu, que faire?* You have been loving him all the while; you love him now!"

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“Hush!” cried Hélène, struck with mortal dread at witnessing her agitation.

But Matilda went on in a mood of self-contrition that was near delirium. “I have robbed you, my best and truest friend, of the greatest joy this earth can give! I have robbed them over there, of their peace and latter-day happiness! Oh, my God, save me from the tortures of hell!”

Hélène rang for the attendants, maids, and trained nurses, all of whom were already in the house. A physician was quickly summoned, for Mrs. Travis was violently ill. The nurses bore her to her bed, and applied the prescribed quietus till the doctors arrived. These remained in consultation till nightfall, when they succeeded in lulling her to sleep, promising to return when the needful moment came.

Hélène Doyle also departed; but returned to spend the night lest Matilda should wake and call for her. In the anxious confusion of the moment, she, as well as those of the house, had completely forgotten Benedict. The thought smote her with anguish. He could not be allowed to return home,

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to this crisis of danger, without preparation. She sped around the corner to the telephone station. She called for his office number; it was but little after five, but the operator could get no reply from that quarter. Hélène turned the matter in her mind; he had perhaps gone out with a colleague and was talking at length, which would delay his return. She would have time to go home and attend to some small domestic matters for her mother. While there she received intermittent calls from Amanda saying Mr. Travis had not returned; and no answers came to the frequent calls to his office! What should they do?

Hélène pacified her with her own explanation of his absence. The office boys had all gone home. She would come herself, shortly, and think up what they should do.

Hélène snatched a hurried taste of her dinner, and, utterly avoiding her mother's fretful questions concerning the cause of her excitement, disappeared quickly out of the house, in the act of adjusting her long cloak about her. When she reached the Dolliver mansion, she stood face to

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face with Benedict, coming from the opposite direction, his face abloom with his usual jovial smile, and his spirits witnessed by his keen, shrill whistle.

“Hello, Hélène!” he cried. “What good-luck brings you here at this hour?” She preceded him rapidly, and he did not see her face till they both stood under the hall-light. Then he knew suddenly something was wrong.

“Hélène! What is it? Tell me quick; are you in trouble?”

She looked up at him with her large gray eyes welling with tears she could not control, “No; it is you!”

He turned to make a dash up-stairs; but she stayed him with her hand.

“Don’t go in to her, now; the doctors are both there. Wait till you are sent for.”

Benedict dropped into a hall-chair, and covered his face with his hands. The sudden shock from his joyous mood caused him to falter a moment.

“Tell me the worst, Hélène. Don’t hide anything from me.”

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She bent down near him and put her hand upon his shoulder.

“You will be brave, dear, as you always are. Matilda is very ill. She sent for me this morning and I came and found her in a strange mood. She has had a violent attack of hysteria. We had her put to bed. The two physicians are here. I returned, because she said she wished me to be near.”

Benedict recovered his self-possession and began to walk up and down the great hall. Its lights and luxury irritated him. In all this glamour of sumptuousness, he felt utterly helpless.

“And is there nothing I can do?” he said at length, suddenly recalling *Hélène’s* presence.

“Nothing; all is being done that is possible to do,” returned she, following him with a look of yearning solicitude to which he was absolutely indifferent. They kept the silent vigil far into the night, with only a whispered remark from Benedict when the stern waiting grew too oppressive.

At last, a maid came tiptoeing down stairs to

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say Miss Doyle was wanted. The poor fellow made a frantic effort to follow her; but he was withheld at the door of the room. Matilda's delirium was at its height. She was tossing her arms about wildly and crying for Hélène. The great ordeal was over; but the dread fever had sapped her excited brain, and she was raving of the wrong she had caused, her dread, and yet her certainty of death.

Hélène's cool hand upon Matilda's hot, pulsating wrist produced a temporary lull in her condition. She could not articulate; she could only give forth the most excruciating groans of mental torture. She pointed to the cradle, then wrapped her burning hands about Hélène's neck, trying by the intensity of her feeling to extract a promise in words she no longer could frame.

Hélène soothed her throbbing temples, stroked her shining hair, and bent low to murmur something in her ear; then the fever dropped two or three degrees, tears streamed from her dilated eyes now closed by a sudden stupor. Hélène was released from her strenuous embrace by the two

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nurses, and went out to conjure up a glimmer of hope for Benedict.

“She is quiet now; if the fever can be checked, there is a chance. I entreat you, go to your rest. You will need it.”

Benedict, completely subdued by the strength of her ministry, did as he was told. She, also, went to a room quite near Matilda's, to rest, but not to sleep. Few closed their eyes that night, knowing how the dark angel hovered with drooping wings over the prostrated home.

CHAPTER XX

BENEDICT CANNOT ACCEPT THE INEVITABLE

*“ And when Thyself with Shining Foot shall pass
Among the Guests Star-scatter’d on the Grass,
And in thy joyous Errand reach the Spot
Where I made one — turn down an empty Glass!”*

THE dread fever which modern science has been able to conquer in many crises like Matilda’s, in her particular case, had won.

The shocking intelligence was communicated to the members of the afflicted household. When the room where Matilda lay. He followed morning broke and the necessary daily movements of a large establishment like the Dolliver house went forth, it was with the oppressive stillness of sudden calamity. Hélène Doyle had to be called to draw Benedict away from the stupefying scene. For three days he walked about the house like one stunned, when compelled to leave

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Hélène about speechlessly; but with a look that seemed to wish to extract from her a reason for this, to him, appalling state of things. It was only after Matilda had been carried out of his presence that he realized he must lift the cast-down wings of his spirit in order to do his duty and live.

Poor Ario Dolliver had not the philosophy which Hélène Doyle exerted to support the bereaved father and husband. When he learned that Matilda's child was a girl, his head fell on his chest as if he were robbed of his last ambition in life. The two men, united for the time being by their common sorrow, felt the intolerable absence from their home of its former love propellers. The time soon came when the subject of Matilda's wishes regarding the child had to be discussed between them.

To Benedict, considering his past association with Hélène, it was the most plausible, and therefore, acceptable conclusion. As for Ario Dolliver, if the child had been a son, he might have conceived some other plan for having him brought

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up at home under his fatherly influence. But a girl, perhaps such another as Matilda,—he could not think of it without his beloved Emmy to guard her early years. He felt he could not again elevate another girl, even though she were his granddaughter, to the heights he had raised her mother. It was hardly possible that the length of his days upon earth would permit it. The late nearness of H  l  ne Doyle and her inclusion in the only deep sorrows he had ever known, fixed the point of their mutual decision.

Little Helen, as she was to be called by Matilda's well-nigh imperative command, was to be transplanted to the more humble but, also, more cultured home on St. John's Avenue. Everything that was necessary to the well-being and comfort of the little daughter of a man like Benedict Travis was provided, and would follow her thither. Benedict's heart was so filled with its still bleeding wound, that he had no thought of admitting in it the small intruder. He was governed, too, by a rather unnatural feeling of resentment toward the innocent cause of his sor-

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row. It would be a long time, he felt, before he could take any interest in the child, or allow it to occupy any place in the vessel that had been consecrated to her fair young mother. Hence it fell to Hélène Doyle to cherish and nurture the motherless infant.

At first, Benedict had nothing to which he could turn for solace but his *magnum opus*, which had been growing during the first year of his marriage. He plunged into it with the fervent hope that here he would find the balm of self-forgetfulness. He toiled at it early and late, sometimes heedless of the late telephone calls that rang to remind him of his dinner hour. He had pursued this method of enforced consolation for many months, when the voice of the inner man cried out to him pitifully but commandingly. His great need of human companionship led him to turn once more to Hélène Doyle, the one being with whom he could relieve his heart when the burden became too weighty. But when he came now, it was always late in the evening when he knew her charge would be

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asleep; so that nothing should harshly accentuate the reality of his changed condition.

He knew something of H  l  ne's theories on the subject of the after life, but there had never been as potent a necessity for him to discuss them with her, as now. H  l  ne had inherited her father's taste for research among the works of great thinkers like Flammarion and others, to glean some light upon the mysticism of the realms beyond. Her belief was that we would wake from death as we wake from sleep; that as we had lived this life, we should continue in the same mind into the next. It was only a modern repetition of the Parable of the Good Seed; what we had sown, we should reap, by the mysterious evolution which governs all species of life around us. Had we not proof of it in nature, in the periodical return of the seasons, the symbolical waking and sleeping of all that lives!

But Benedict, with the keen memory of his loss still fresh in his mind, argued:

“If those who pass out of this world in youth, health, and beauty must return to their first

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stages of growth as do the plants, trees, and other vegetation that re-live from year to year, then is there no real adjustment of personal ties?

“No; the human family is too vast to consider individual relations. As our great modern poet says, ‘All memory sifting with Time’s gentle art,’ we lose sight of our past woes, and find full and perfect compensation in new ties.”

Benedict appreciated Hélène’s breadth of soul, and the large scope of her views on like subjects. But he was not yet ready to espouse and support them.

There was another gifted gentleman in Baltimore, who knew Hélène Doyle, not quite so well as Benedict, but who always raised his hat in passing her door out of respect for the sacred presence that dwelt there.

Benedict, like all who have passed through great sorrow, was intensely self-absorbed. He did not wish to forget his trouble. He brooded over it, taking a morbid comfort in recalling all the ecstasies he had felt while ascending to the fatal hypothermose of worldly enjoyment. He

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had been so conscious of his divine harmony with all things good! This unexpired bolt from heaven, in the midst of perfect peace and joy, staggered and changed his life to one of desolation, in spite of health, strength, and power to achieve; for in this he was rich enough.

When springtime came again, and he rode through the parks of the city, some slight circumstance, like the tone of a voice, the scent of a certain flower, the glimpse of a strikingly beautiful woman, reminding him of Matilda, would stir within him all the memories that had graced the morning of his life. His fancy would then brighten him to a smile, the consciousness of which would immediately cast him into that most dangerous abyss, self-pity. To think of that beautiful, adorable creature, cut down in the fulness of young womanhood; torn from his side by death, and laid in the cold, cold earth away from all that she had loved, the warmth of tenderness, adulation, and the triumph of young motherhood in her first-born!

He could not, or would not think of her in

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death; white, silent, unmoved by his passionate appeals, for it reminded him of the time when he had pleaded with her and she had remained cruelly beautiful. Yet even then, smiling through her tears, she had sought to comfort him. It was that alone which had kept him from despairing, from giving up the conflict. Now, it was different. Before, he had proved to himself that all things in life were possible; but in death, there was no resisting the unseen forces that in the twinkling of an eye, have changed the destiny of kingdoms, have brought desolation to the happiest hearths! He had no refuge but hard, unremitting toil. He would drown the sting of its torment by going down as deeply into the subjects that were to promote his great law book, as he had in the contemplation of his misery. There was nothing that could take the place of his work, or bring the needed relief to his bruised spirit. He was still too young to realize that our most heart-rending emotions inspire our greatest and noblest deeds.

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Mrs. Doyle now gazed upon Benedict with a kind of awe-stricken expression, commingled with deference whenever she met him, and had no hesitancy in expressing her feelings when he was absent.

“Such a preposterous arrangement of affairs; I never heard of the like. My daughter, imposed upon with the care of a child not her own!” she exclaimed with indignation. “Well, there is only one thing to redeem us in the eyes of our friends; his paying every cent of the expense incurred thereby. A nurse, we are obliged to have, and two maids instead of one. Of course, I do not object to them, they relieve me, and also H  l  ne of much additional care. And what will it all lead to, in the end, I should like to know!”

There was no one in the vicinity able to give Mrs. Doyle a satisfactory conclusion. H  l  ne was more Sphinx-like and speechless than ever on that subject and the poor lady was left to her own deductions, which were to hope for the best, and expect the worse.

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As time went on the domestic matters of the Dolliver household, which included Benedict, resumed a more normal and more natural aspect. Every one interested seemed to be reconciled to the extraordinary arrangement that H  l  ne Doyle should guard the earliest years of Matilda's child.

She fell to the task as naturally and uncomplainingly as she had done to everything imposed upon her as a duty. But perhaps to this she lent more willingness and desire. With her sensitive, affectionate nature, she took the full blame of the catastrophe upon herself, still covered by her smile of plaintive serenity. She suffered untold agonies in listening to Benedict's broken-hearted lamentations. She constantly strove to lift him out of the despondency that was gradually settling down upon him, watching his moods, inviting his sympathy when that seemed to afford him relief, or shunning it whenever he wished to be silent.

Fortunately or unfortunately for those who mourned Matilda, her nature had not been one

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to be greatly shocked or materially injured by the discovery of H  l  ne's secret. Had she lived she would have subdued it and her friend to her power and service without any uncomfortable feelings to herself. But in H  l  ne Doyle's twofold affliction, her wrong to Matilda magnified itself to an intensity that formed the keynote of all her sufferings.

There are natures who never divulge the sacredness of their innermost feelings; and these we have no right to delineate without discrimination, to expose the most sensitive fibres of their being. She had not shown her sufferings, her disappointments, her moments of despair, to the thoughtless, shallow world that judged her as a sweet but emotionless woman.

Of those who understood her least was H  l  ne's own mother. In spite of her daughter's perpetual efforts to look and point out to others the brighter side of everything, Mrs. Doyle invariably checked all her impulses to be hopeful, inciting the poor girl to an occasional "turning of the worm." Then the mother would fly into

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passionate recriminations, and accuse H  l  ne of undutiful conduct.

“Can’t you see how unreasonable you are, H  l  ne? You get excited and fly into a vortex. I never saw you nervous and irritable before, or get so wrought up at the least little thing I say about anything. It is a great pity, indeed, if, at my time of life, I’m not allowed to express my opinions about what goes on in this house!” And Mrs. Doyle would bridle up and agitate her gauze fan in quite a gale of vexation.

“I really think it is that child’s being in the house; your whole attention, devotion, and mind are lavished upon her, and you are wearing yourself out. I always said the whole thing was an insane idea, but of course my wishes were not consulted. You will become a nervous wreck, yourself, like Benedict, if you are not more careful!”

Outbursts of this nature were of frequent occurrence in the dignified home, and in time left their effect upon H  l  ne; but it was due to the continual conflict with that negative spirit,

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robbing her of a woman's natural impulse, as she had robbed her in childhood.

But Hélène's frank outpouring of a warm and loving nature found its outlet in the child, Benedict's child, to whom she could disclose her strongest, her best, her most fearless emotions.

Several years elapsed during which Hélène kept her trust and failed in no respect. She had mothered the innocent, helpless child and won her love through its most natural channels. Little Helen, waking to her first consciousness through the loving tenderness of Aunt Hélène, had not felt the loss of her own mother. The time came when, with keen perception, she differentiated between the terms, "auntie" and "mother."

"You call Mrs. Doyle 'mother,' and the little girls at kindergarten speak of their mothers! You are like their mothers to me and I call you Aunt Hélène."

The complexity of affectionate near relationship was too deep a subject to satisfy the bright little mind. So Hélène explained:

"The words 'mother' and 'auntie' are almost

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the same, dear. If I had a sister and you were her little girl I would love you almost as much as she; and I would do as much for you as she would, if she were not living."

"Was my mother your sister, Aunt Hélène?"

"No; but I loved her just as much as if she had been."

"Then, it is just the same, only the names are different," replied the trustful little girl, quite satisfied with the explanation. With Hélène's mother, the child was deferential, ceremonial, always calling her "Mrs. Doyle," never offering a caress and rarely yielding to one. With Aunt Hélène, she lavished all the fondness of her reserved little heart, whenever they were alone. She scarcely knew her father. He had hardly noticed her during her immediate babyhood; and though she had grown to that important age of four when little girls are taken to private kindergartens, where their refined little natures need not be shocked by the speech and manners of undesirable people, she retained for her father the same reticence,

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inherited from her mother when not perfectly sure of one's sympathy.

Benedict had spoken with her at the rare times when he visited the Doyles during her waking hours. H  l  ne was more amused than pleased at his timid, hesitating manner of approaching her. A child is quick to feel the responsive heart that throbs to its own. She would hasten away to school, first embracing H  l  ne, and pausing at her father's knee, according to Auntie's instruction, and holding up her little face for him to place a butterfly kiss on her rosy cheek, which greeting enthused her departure with her waiting nurse.

Mrs. Doyle rarely assisted at these little ceremonies, although she was always sweetly affable in meeting Benedict. The atmosphere of the home was naturally a little strained, with that minor element of loving expansion and sincerity in the other two. Benedict was pressed with immediate duties at his office and disappeared accordingly. His evenings he spent chiefly at his work, "Higher Jurisprudence,"

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until the late hour and physical weariness drew him back to the deserted mansion.

It was then that the Atwood ladies, by a strange irony of fate, came to the rescue. Angela who had always felt a certain sympathy for Hélène, and Maud who pretended to do so, evolved the bright idea of inviting Mrs. Doyle to spend the summer at their attractive home in the Thousand Islands. Mrs. Doyle consented after due deliberation, relishing the prospect of living in absolute luxury, with motor-cars, motor-launches, and servants at her disposal.

“I think it would really do me a world of good, Hélène; and you can get on very well with the two maids and the housekeeper until October.” To which miraculous decision Hélène acquiesced with tremulous though solicitous readiness.

The news of it was hailed with joy by the clique of non-vacationists particularly concerned. Sophie Hadley could not repress her indignant merriment.

“Mrs. Doyle’s going to the Thousand Islands

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with the Atwoods! Well, I'll be humdrummed! Good riddance to the whole bunch of bad rubbish! It reminds me of that man, I read about in the newspapers this morning—newspaper wit, you know—whose wife was so nervously prostrated after living with him three years that she started out in quest of a quiet summer resort. Meeting some friends in Philadelphia, she telegraphed him:

“ ‘ Dear, I'm going to the Thousand Islands with the Duffies.’

“ He telegraphed back: ‘ All right, dearest, stay at least a week in each island!’

“ That's what I'd like to do with the whole kit of them—Atwoods and Mother Doyle. I think that woman is the limit of endurance. She'll be a sweet element in Benedict's and Hélène's home if they ever do make a match. Old women like that can't be pleasant to live with and ought to be summarily dealt with, like those Eskimos that man lectured about last winter at the Y. M. C. A.”

“ Oh, Sophie!” ejaculated Lucy, fearing she

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was in for a long story. "What Eskimos do you mean?"

"Why, don't you remember? He said that that part of Alaska was an ideal place for family harmony. Mothers, grandmothers, and, worst of all, old maids past sixty-five were cordially invited to submit to the decrees of the land; that is, to attire themselves in their best Sunday-go-to-meeting gowns, and allow themselves to be gently put to the quietus of all their earthly woes by the sudden jerking of a slip noose around the neck, in the presence of their assembled families. Mothers Atwood and Doyle ought to be progressively transported from each one of the Thousand Islands to the land of those Eskimos."

"You had better be careful how you talk about old ladies and old maids," warned Lucy, assuming a smilingly reproachful look at her elder sister. "You might get to be one yourself, if you live long enough," and Lucy dismissed the subject from her own mind, feeling almost sure that *she* would never be one herself.

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“In this civilized land of Christianity, I would limit the execution to the disagreeable ones, for I’m not an old maid; and I never expect to be, if that means that you have to grow old and cranky and take a hateful and sour view of life. Thank goodness, I can see the good and bright or funny side of everything!”

And Sophie spoke the truth.

CHAPTER XXI

BENEDICT PAYS A RUDE PENALTY

*“ There was the Door to which I found no Key;
There was the Veil through which I might not see;
Some little talk a while of Me and Thee
There was — and then no more of Thee and Me.”*

TO add to Benedict's cup of trouble, Ario Dolliver, after a hard fight to reconcile his life without his loved ones, gave up the struggle. When Matilda died, life for him was robbed of its last great attraction. He was content to turn over to Benedict the bulk of his stupendous interests, knowing his trustworthiness, making him co-sharer in all his wealth. They spent many hours together, dissecting the various intricacies of multitudinous “ schemes.” Mr. Dolliver's ambition had been unquenched, till the one who had inspired it was no more. He wished to leave a good fourth of his fortune to such public charities

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of the city as he endorsed. The remainder was to be his granddaughter's, left in charge of the father, who was to be chief executor of the will and residuary legatee. Having thus prudently and justly disposed of all his worldly goods, he turned his thoughts to the transmutation of himself into the world to come. That there was such a world he inwardly rejoiced in believing. The ego, the great I Am, in him was as strong as ever despite his broken human vesture. He was not ready to stop doing; he would go on working and loving in endless ages to come. And in this exalted state of mind, he passed to the long rest that would ultimately clothe him in power and strength to attain the spiritual goal.

Benedict was intensely impressed by the *largesse* of this plain, sober-minded, just man, and his attitude towards the future. It was here that Ario Dolliver exemplified Hélène Doyle's idea, that life is not "an eternal petrification." He had not had the study and learning which some of us require to give birth to these interpretations; but he had in him the faith to do right and

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to mount to his worldly achievements by steps that were honest and fair. Benedict felt more humbled than grieved when he helped to bear his father-in-law out of his home. He had felt the influence of this strong, upright, always cheerful nature upon himself. It reflected by contrast his own small, selfish views of the things that had come to cross his pathway, his grief, and the consequent loss of the bright, hopeful spirit which Mr. Dolliver had never ceased to hold in his presence. And it did much to restore his own manhood.

It was not long after, that Benedict began to consider more seriously his position as head of a family with a child and a great fortune to direct. His morose attitude toward himself and the rest of the world was certainly not to be maintained indefinitely. Shortly after Ario left him, he completed his book. His mind, cudgelled by affliction, had given forth in his work the best, the strongest, the most that it could render; and it increased his sadness to feel that the one being who he had hoped would share its emoluments

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with him, was gone. He took up its pages, fondly leafing them one by one. So many memories were intertwined among those at its beginning! He could not bear to part with them. He dreaded to submit them, lest the public who would read them might guess the tender thoughts which had given them their first, most powerful impulse.

One evening, as he sat in his now lonely grandeur feeling very much as Mrs. Dolliver had done in her first days of occupancy, he rose with sudden decision, walked to the telephone and called up the Philosopher. He was the gentleman who raised his hat in passing H  l  ne Doyle's residence.

He acted promptly on the summons, having for Benedict that feeling of fellowship which sometimes hold men together "through thick and thin," as they express it. Benedict did not need, but wanted his "pushing," to help him decide the fate of his book.

"You are in a bad way, my dear fellow, to bring me here for such a purpose. I've never

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known you to be undecided before. Why don't you stir yourself a little, and bring some life into this house? Here you are living like a recluse—a man of your age! You have a child; that child ought to be here; she'd liven you up pretty quick, I'll wager."

At the mention of the child, Benedict nettled:

"How can I have her here with me alone? She's grown fond of Hélène. I can't take her away, just yet, without causing trouble."

"Why don't you bring Hélène here with her?" asked the Philosopher, with a look in his eye that pretended merriment, but was truly solicitous.

Benedict sighed. "That's another question," he said, studying the falling of the ashes of his cigar into the delicately worked Parisian tray. "I have thought of it," he finally resumed.

"I'm relieved, and glad to hear it," returned the Philosopher, with firmness. "If you had n't I don't know but what I might have."

"Hey?" queried Benedict, with a searching look.

"Yes," replied his friend, "if not in Hélène's

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case, in some one's else," he went on encouragingly. "It's absurd for men of mind, like you and me, to be fretting away their lives in lonely celibacy! A home is the thing a man needs, where he can relax and be soothed by the gentle influence of a woman, not of his own family." In his home, somewhere down in the southern part of West Virginia, he had sisters, maiden aunts, and cousins numbering thirteen in the aggregate.

"I quite agree with you in your case," smiled Benedict. "I've thought lately that you've been looking particularly spruced up and chirpy since you've been frequenting the Hadleys'. Who is it, — Sophie?"

"No."

"Then it's Lucy, since she's the only one left. That's all right, my dear boy; go it lively. You've got no time to waste."

"That's the advice I had reserved for you," quibbled his friend. They were the best of chums, and sat till late discussing all sorts of domestic felicity problems which, to the Philosopher, savored of the freshness of novelty.

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When he took his departure, Benedict sat an hour longer in his study making *résumés* of their conversation.

He dropped the subject of his book and said, "Why not take his advice?"

Another long siege of self-contemplation. Is he still Benedict, the one blessed with all the gifts that nature can bestow on one of its creatures, and to be cheated at last! The idea looms before him, like a haunting menace. Despite his inconsolable state he thinks he will turn to Hélène again. His long friendship, her devotion to his child, her care and thought for him, have failed to inspire for her any emotion save gratitude. Yet he is willing to stake his happiness on so stable and sound a feeling.

He has reached a stage of maturity in excess of his actual years. He has acquired the habit of unvarying seriousness. His smile is rare; for he is considering the feasibility of a marriage with Hélène. Everything seems to point to it as the best, most natural thing for him to do. Of course, he cannot offer her a place in his

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heart such as Matilda held, but he will offer her fidelity, a high appreciation of her many superior qualities. More than that, he would raise her to a position of affluence and wealth far more suited to her mental qualifications than the life of penury she was used to, resulting from the daily complexities arising from the insufficiency of her exchequer. He judged, therefore, that Hélène would be highly pleased with his mature and carefully deliberated proposal.

In this complacent frame of mind he walked one blustering morning early in March to have his interview with Hélène. She was not surprised to see him, owing to his custom of visiting them at that hour, and received him with her usual smiling serenity.

There was a slight touch of embarrassment in his manner as he seated himself. He did not quite know how to broach the subject which had been discarded by them seven years before.

“I have come, Hélène,” he said, at length, “to renew the proposition I made to you some time ago. You will recall that when you refused

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to consider it, under existing circumstances, I said, little dreaming of the subsequent happenings, that I did not mean to drop it; I am here now for that purpose."

Hélène had trained herself to speak to him without emotion. She looked at him, feeling the utter lack of it in him.

"Tell me your proposition, Benedict. I will hear it gladly if it is anything by which I can aid you."

"It is," he returned, showing slight irritation at the placid manner in which she received his words. He had said once to the Philosopher, during the past five years, that Hélène sometimes was "aggravatingly calm."

"Because you are aggravatingly delinquent," his friend had retorted. So he waited a moment before he resumed.

"You have already helped me so much that I am bold enough to ask you to continue your most estimable assistance by consenting to become my wife. You have taken care of my child for nearly five years, you have won her

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affection and confidence; and it is time for her to come to me. How else can we arrange matters, so that we may go on in the same amicable, peaceful way — restore my daughter's life to a more normal condition; insure your comfort and well-being for life; and afford me a home, where I may daily relax from the strain of mental labor and be soothed by the influence you have always exerted more or less over me."

She looked at him as he sat there, so coldly indifferent. His words unnerved her. His very attitude kindled the spark of her long-smothered resentment and indignation. She rose to address him.

"You come to me, Benedict, to ask me, in plain words, to take charge of your house, to continue nurturing your child, and make your home a *dolce far niente* where you may find peace and rest to your mental labors. Forsooth, how soon we tire of our dumb treasures, and cease to find in them the joy forever which ends in joyless satiety! No woman is willing to accept a man who is ready to give what you offer with

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no other return but 'high appreciation.' I hold at too great a value my sense of self-respect and justice to accede to your proposition under such conditions."

Her gray eyes grew darker and more penetrating, her cheek flushed lightly, her hands were cold, and the conventional smile evaporated into thin air by the ardor of her words.

"You offer me a comfortable position in your home. I am poor, — you have intimated it, — but not so poor as to forget my dignity and my rights."

Benedict stared at her in utter amaze. He was more stupefied than at any of the calamities he had been through.

"You are offended because I do not offer you love — the love I still cherish for Matilda? Then you are jealous! Jealous of her memory," retorted Benedict, quick to feel the contagion of her displeasure. "You pretended to be her friend! Hélène, you must know —"

She stayed him with her extended hand, interrupting him.

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“Let me speak, I will soon have done. There was no pretence; I loved Matilda and you knew it. You have taken advantage of that love; and have no cause to blame me, I think, for the manner in which I have honored her memory. I have watched over you and shared your sorrow, I have given you all my sympathy, even my love, unsolicited — you might as well know it, now that you have killed it — and have tried to do her wishes in every particular, to make atonement.”

“Not altogether,” broke in Travis. “You must have known the ultimate result that her wish implied! It is the principal reason why I am here to-day; to fulfil her wishes to the very end. She may have guessed your feelings toward me and charged you with the sacred trust, her child, in compensation for what she had robbed you of! But it is I who am robbed, since you say your interest in me now is dead.”

Hélène again put out her hand as if to check his cruel words. Her face and lips were white, the only signs that betrayed the conflict in her heart.

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“Let me speak,” she commanded. “It is you who have provoked it. Don’t make it harder for me to do what I must. Matilda never knew my feelings toward you till that last day I spoke with her. I have sought to repair my fault by my devotion to her child, to you; but now, I know what you are capable of. You cling to a fading memory—a ghost of the past—and ignore the vital obligation of the present!”

Hélène’s words stung him long after he had left her. He merely said,

“If you have finished accusing me of malice, selfishness, and all uncharitableness, I will wish you good-morning.”

Hélène inclined her head and watched him till he had passed out of the door. It would have been difficult for her to control herself after this scene, if, fresh upon his footsteps, little Helen had not come running to her and embraced her fondly. Hélène was glad of this opportunity to reassume her all-covering smile. It was particularly tender now. At the same moment Mrs. Doyle entered.

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“We have been waiting luncheon for you,” said she, and gave her a scrutinizing look. “Come, you and little Helen, without further demonstration.”

They entered the dining-room. The maid had disappeared for Miss Doyle’s lunch.

“Little Helen, run up and fetch Mrs. Doyle’s glasses, which were left on the reading-table in my room. I forgot them in coming down.”

The child rose from the table to execute the command. During her absence, the mother hastily inquired of H  l  ne:

“What was all that excited talk about between you and Benedict? At first, it looked to me as if he had come to renew his proposal.”

“He did; and he was angered at my refusal.”

“You refused him, H  l  ne! How dared you!”

Mrs. Doyle was quite agitated and dropped her fork.

By this time the little girl and the waitress returned, the one to pick up the fork and supply another, and the little girl to say she could n’t find

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Mrs. Doyle's glasses anywhere, — when suddenly the poor bewildered lady found them in her pocket.

The luncheon progressed in silence and Stygian gloom, occasionally relieved by some bright remark of little Helen. After lunch, she and Auntie went to sit at one of the front windows, as was their custom; for it was Friday afternoon and Helen had been promised a promenade in the park with her nurse soon after the noon-day meal. They were renewing their vows of love and fidelity.

"I will always love you better than any one else in the world," Helen said. *Hélène* had been trying to prepare her for the separation.

"If I must go and live with my father without you, I shall never learn to like him. When he came out of this house to-day, I met him at the door. He did not look at me at all. I am glad. He looked so very cross and sour!"

Hélène buried her head in the child's curls in another embrace to hide her own resentment.



She bound his head with the veil she tore from her hat

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Just then Benedict's car went past at furious speed.

"There he goes!" cried the child. "He's going so fast, I hope the policeman will catch him and lock him up in the jail. I will be glad!"

Hélène did not hear the words. Instinctively her head turned to the window. She saw him passing them, his face set and determined, looking neither to the right nor left. It showed the same angry look it had worn when he had left her nearly two hours before. His indifference to them both was boundless.

A sudden impulse seized her. She gave the child into the nurse's hands; there was no restraining her. She flew to the telephone; by a lucky coincidence she called for the garage.

"Quick, Capet; I want the speediest machine you have in your garage."

"The speediest machine, mademoiselle, is already in use. M. Traveesse has it."

"I know — I've just seen him pass; the next best, then, — I want to catch up with him."

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M. Capet obeyed orders promptly. By the time Hélène had snatched her hat and cloak, he was at the door. She mounted, urging him on. There was no time for explanations. They must follow him. All she said was,

"Ou est il allé?"

"Villo Brook, mademoiselle."

"Fly!" she returned.

They both knew they had a "sweating race" before them even to catch a glimpse of his car. Capet knew the road well. He had taken Monsieur to Willow Brook numerous times. At last he recognized the leading machine just disappearing behind a hill on the horizon. He redoubled his speed till they came to the top of that hill, when, looking down, they beheld a ghastly sight. The car having run too close to the edge of the steep embankment, had lunged down the declivity forty or fifty feet.

Hélène rushed to the scene. She found Benedict lying many feet from his murderous machine, his head gashed and bleeding. She raised his head upon her lap and bound his wound with the

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veil she tore from her hat, then with her handkerchief, and his, till the wrappings refused to stanch the blood streaming from the cut.

In the meantime Capet had rushed back for the nearest assistance. When he returned, Hélène was still bending over Benedict. He had partially regained consciousness, and could hear her heart throbs close to his ear. His eyes opened; he saw her looking down at him.

"Hélène," he gasped, "always near in time of need," and relapsed again into unconsciousness. They took him to his own home; he was too far from the other. Physicians were summoned, surgeons, nurses, all the paraphernalia necessary to an accident in a rich man's house. Hélène remained to know the result. A thorough examination had to be made. He was seriously hurt; but the wound need not prove fatal.

CHAPTER XXII

HÉLÈNE EXPERIENCES A REACTION

*"Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate."*

WHEN Benedict left the Doyle residence after his sudden and unexpected disappointment, his mind teemed with accusations against her who had planned such an assault upon him. He was stunned and stupefied by it. Hélène, of all women, who had posed as his friend all these years, and then at the crisis when he needed her most, to fail him! He now misinterpreted all she had said to him and magnified his injury in his own eyes. He was totally blind to the errors in his conduct which she attacked, and thought himself blameless and therefore deeply injured. The more he thought of it, the

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more he felt the sense of its injustice. He was fast nearing a mood bordering on desperation, when he finally reached his home.

He sat down to his mid-day meal in a mood surpassing that of his friends left lunching at the same hour. He took but little food, and comported himself generally in a nervous, irritable manner utterly unbecoming his lately acquired dignity. He rang for M. Capet, his Paris chauffeur.

"Bring the French car around at half-past two; I'll take a run out to Willow Brook."

On the minute Capet was at the *porte-cochère*, and stepped down lightly to open the door for Benedict.

"Clear out of that steering seat; I'll take that myself," Benedict said, feeling that he would welcome the lashing wind and freezing rain he would have to encounter. Capet looked surprised and disappointed.

"Shall I not conduct Monsieur?" he asked, incredulously.

"No, Capet; I go alone."

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He leaped to the front seat, grasped the steering gear and set his face to the wind, desperate, daring, and defiant.

It was in this mood that he passed Hélène and the little girl at the window. He seemed conscious of them as he went by for he made an effort to accelerate his speed and his look of defiance was intensified.

He soon reached the open fields beyond the smoky city and immediately felt better. As if in response to his ameliorated mood, the storm ceased and a lurid sun broke through the heavy clouds. He checked his pace to take in the wintry scene, but hearing another car behind him he looked back. It was then that he made his disastrous run.

When that memorable day was finally past and Hélène reached her home late at night, through the courtesy of this same Monsieur Capet, it was a great relief to find the household sound asleep, uninformed yet, she hoped, of what had happened. She went straight to her room, glad of the opportunity to be alone.

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A crisis, a sudden appeal to one's affections, acts as a powerful stimulant to one's activities. Nothing but her quick, correct decision had saved the accident from fatality.

Once in the seclusion of her own room her feelings of the morning experienced a complete revulsion.

What had she done! She had taunted him, and reproached him for disregarding the love he had never known, bringing the first angry flame to his eyes, while she had been the only one in the wrong. She had censured him for the true, loyal nature that made him cling to the memory of his first love! She had wrung from him the cruel words, "Then you are jealous of the love I still cherish for Matilda!" Oh, how would he judge her now!—now that he was prostrated and suffering through her selfish justification and pride.

The anguish of her remorse, she felt, her burning tears would never wash away. For by her own act, she had brought separation from the child and from him. Her mad race to rescue

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him did not count at all. In his wounded and bewildered state, he had spoken to her kindly. When he should recover, he would remember the scene and despise her. Shocked by the sight of him lying there helpless and hurt, all her resentment had taken wings. She remembered only the happy-hearted youth who had filled her sombre girlhood with the only brightness she had ever known.

Far into the night she thought and prayed, while the recording angel above shed tears of pity for them both.

Benedict's physical injury was not a serious one. He suffered more from the long period of mental gloom, coupled with the continuous strain of hard mental labor. The blow had been deep enough to touch some sensitive nerve in the vicinity of the cerebellum, and a peculiar disturbance was created throughout his whole nervous system.

The wound itself gradually healed, but the mind did not; for he was succumbing to a general relaxation of the nervous tissues, commonly

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known as nervous prostration. The accident had hastened, but not brought on the condition.

Every day Hélène made inquiries regarding him. In the course of two months his general health functions were sound; but the ravages done to the mind could not be restored in so short a time. The moment he left his bed, he began to evince symptoms of mental derangement. He sat for hours in one place, showing no desire to take his share in the joy-giving activities that make life worth while. He shrank from human society other than his father and mother, and his brilliant flow of words was completely hushed. Such a perverted state of the human mind as led men, in the olden days, to monastic seclusion, as being the only solace to their injured feelings; a sudden distaste for all things human and natural, such as drove the monks into caves and deserted localities with the warped and fanciful notion that they were benefiting the world by exiling themselves from it, settled upon him.

To be thus struck down in the flush of ardent

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manhood; to have his sunny nature shrouded in this veil of mental darkness, seemed to Hélène Doyle a tragedy. In May, his physicians advised him to be transported to Willow Brook. There the sight of budding nature, of sweet familiar objects, the open sweep of pure country air, would accomplish his final recovery. This was the verdict given by Dr. Wintchell, the famous nerve specialist of New York and Baltimore, two cities between which he divided his time. The other doctors shook their heads and doubted. Benedict himself chose to agree with them. But the great apostle of the present-day science and humanity had made the statement and himself firmly believed in it.

Benedict obeyed and went to the home of his parents. He was in that state of mental weakness that made it impossible for him to resist. He accepted the fact surlily, but uncomplainingly, as he would have the calamity of losing his physical sight, or hearing, admitting no possibility of rehabilitation, and submitted to it obediently with the coldness of enforced philosophy.

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He bore his burden silently but manfully, hard as it was to live under it.

Benedict lived in this condition of self-incarceration for three months. He took pleasure in nothing, and had to be urged by those who had right to command him to enjoy the simple pleasures and benefits of life in a beautiful country home.

Poor Hélène had all she could do to retain her habitual placidity after the accident. She felt sure of his safety now, and hoped for his ultimate recovery; but that time for her was fraught with the anguish of recollection. No one knew what words had passed between them during that wretched interview; and Hélène held her peace. She lived in continual dread of the time when he should be reinstated to sound mind and judgment by the perfect readjustment of his physical nature, through the wisdom and science of the great physician who had predicted his complete recovery.

How would Benedict regard her when that time came? She had sought to tear down his

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idol of five years, the spoken testimony of his loyal, steadfast fidelity to his first love. He would never forgive her. And she must go on living and loving, without hope, passing her days in the remembrance only of his earlier sincerity; like one who is resigned but who has lost a fair illusion.

The only compensation left her now was that of retaining the child for an indefinite period longer. She found comfort in their mutual love and sorrow for him in his present condition. Hélène had explained to her what had happened to her father, and how very ill he had been and still was. Her own genuine grief in relating the circumstance had the effect of changing, with the lightning swiftness of youthful minds, the little girl's former attitude towards her father to one of genuine sorrow and solicitude. She spoke of him frequently, and longed to go and pet him as soon as he was well enough.

Thus the days dragged wearily enough for him and those whose affection he had always retained. His old friends were all anxious

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about him and plied Hélène with questions concerning him. She always affirmed that he was better and improving every day, and he was, though the change was well nigh imperceptible. She wished them all to hold for him that positive thought of certainty. Her own thought was so charged with the vitalizing power of love that it was fruitful and effective; it became the hidden, silent current, adding its force to his recovery, all the more potent because of its subtlety.

It was about this time that the Philosopher, knowing of the long waiting, took matters into his own hand and went to New York to interview his own publishers.

“I’ve brought you this book; it’s been lying in wait far too long. Don’t be alarmed,” he said, when he showed them the bulk of it, “it’s not mine,” he added laughing. “It’s young Travis’s great book. I thought you’d be glad to take a look at it.”

“We are, indeed, Mr. Donnithorn, we shall be very happy to give it our prompt attention

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and let you know our decision in a very few days."

The Philosopher gave them a sly wink, adding, "You may call yourself lucky to have had the first chance at it!" as he departed. The third day after his visit to them he received a note saying they would be pleased to see him in regard to Mr. Benedict Travis's book. They knew Mr. Donnithorn as Benedict's best friend, and were ready to arrange with him immediately and draw up a contract. The Philosopher answered by telephone.

"Look here; to the deuce with your contract, don't bother about it. Go ahead and put out the book; he'll not kick about your terms, I'll answer for that. My conscience, he didn't do it to add to his millions! Rush it out, I say; and surprise him with it when he wakes up from his lethargy."

So that matter was settled and the Philosopher gave it no more thought.

Then came the usual exodus of summer resorters. The Atwoods, with Mrs. Doyle under

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their wing, took their flight to the Thousand Islands early in May. Others followed their example, and very soon the social element of the city which remained was more relieved than sorry by their absence. Sophie Hadley was the one who struck the first note of rejoicing.

"Isn't it splendid to have Mrs. Doyle out of the way for six months! It will give H  l  ne a good rest, at least," she remarked to Edith, who had dropped in for a call, on her way to town. Sophie was pottering around at half a dozen different things; Lucy was sitting in the reading section of the "front room," serenely embroidering "L. H." upon some new fine damask table napkins.

"It's a great pity they didn't take H  l  ne along also, after the shock she's had this year," Edith remarked.

"H  l  ne would never have gone," interposed Lucy. "Besides, she is too much interested in Benedict's recovery to have put such a distance between them."

"Well, Edith!" said Sophie, ignoring Lucy's

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remark. "You remind me of a woman I used to know, by that speech of yours."

"What woman?" asked Mrs. Rasburn, knowing some entertainment was coming.

"Well, she just couldn't look a real benefit in the face without giving it a slap sideways. She got a huge box of extra fine oranges from a dear friend in Florida. When she opened it, she exclaimed: 'Oh, isn't it a pity there aren't a few grape-fruit in it!' Nothing for that woman was ever so good that there wasn't something 'too bad' about it."

"I hope that won't be the case with you, Sophie dear. By the way, how is your friend, the widower?"

"I haven't heard or seen anything of him for six weeks. We're having what you used to call '*relâche*' at the French theatres, when there was 'nothing doing' in them."

Edith laughed, and Lucy, whose maidenly hopes were nearing consummation, piped up again.

"Sophie, if you would devote yourself to

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writing that long-talked-of novel, as assiduously as you do to those long letters you write to your friend, I'm sure you'd made a grand success of it! Then, perhaps, you'd be content with your old friend 'Eterno' and let the other one go; since you say you are only encouraging him through fear of being left alone. You could come and live with us. You would never need to be alone except when you chose to be," suggested Lucy, who was always trying to arrange matters for those who couldn't look to them themselves.

Sophie had now reached that most attractive age of woman when she assumes all things with a quiet acceptance that is positively soothing. She was not much older in heart or actions, but she had attained the inevitable contour of *avoir-dupois* which classed her among the "fair, fat, and forty." She always declared she would never be an "old maid" in the common acceptance of the term.

"I have no wrinkles, except those around my eyes from laughing. A woman of forty odd years — odd is good, it's nice and stretchy —

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is ready for any career. She is at the height of her mental, physical, and moral perfection. She's more 'settled,' as Lottie calls it. She's not on the everlasting hunt for the not impossible 'he.' I gave up all hopes of matrimony long ago. All I want for a husband is my indelibly blue pencil. He is sometimes called 'Eterno.' That's the very best qualification for a husband; no danger of a divorce! The more you use him, the better he serves you."

Sophie's original philosophy was one of her most attractive traits. She won everybody by it and her generous heart. And who shall say that when her forty years were odd enough, she did not succumb to the wiles and fascinations of a comfortable widower who needed the companionship of just such a wife, and who recognized in her the very thing he was looking for—a woman with an inexhaustible fund of good nature; practical and sensible, coupled with a droll interpretation of every phase of life; withal surprisingly entertaining?

CHAPTER XXIII

HÉLÈNE DOYLE EXPECTS THE WORSE, AND MEETS THE BEST

*" Ah Love! could thou and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits — and then,
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"*

SUMMER advanced and the imperceptible change in Benedict deepened, hour by hour, day by day. He was truly convalescing and his recuperating condition manifested itself in unmistakable symptoms. His recovery now became a fact; but as simple as when two magnetic needles drop to opposite poles. His love of life returned. He viewed with gentle pleasure the serious business of mature birds with their families; the harvesting of golden wheat, and the look of satisfaction on the bright young faces of some of the reapers. Life, indeed, was worth

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the tussle he and that good man, Dr. Wintchell, had made for it.

One day in July the doctor came to see him and found him much improved. He said:

“Do not take up mental labor just yet; go, rather, into your fields and make hay; pile it up into fantastic stacks. I have seen some that look like Chinese pagodas. Earn your daily bread by the sweat of your brow; become the primeval man for one year. It will refresh and strengthen you, build up your renewed nerve force, and add ten years to your life. Then you will be ready for anything, a Superior Court judgeship, a presidential campaign — anything that requires tough endurance.”

Benedict did not take the whole of his physician's advice; but he liked it and profited by it. He was never intended for anything but a “gentleman farmer.” His mind was too keen, too deeply concerned with the solving of life's great problems. Therefore, disregarding Dr. Wintchell's advice, he began to think; but his were not now the tense thoughts of strenuous

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mental labor; they were thoughts that came to him spontaneously; tender thoughts that sent thrills of pleasurable emotions through his entire system. He realized that budding joy is a vitalizer; that the love he felt in his heart for all things was worth more than all the tonics of the old century's quacks.

These natural, inherent sentiments paved the way for others that were still higher and more vital. He thought of his child!

One morning some days previous to the doctor's visit, a letter had come to him. It was from little Helen. It spoke of her tender solicitude for his health, and of her wish to come soon to play with him, and pet him. At the foot of the page, below her signature, Helen Dolliver Travis, was this important postscript:

"I am very sorry I said I hoped the policeman would lock you up in the jail. I told Aunt Hélène I was. But she said it was not enough, and that I must say it to you; so here it is."

When Benedict read it, he broke into a shout of laughter in spite of the moisture brought to his

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eyes by the first part of the letter. It was the first time he had laughed in three months, and his mother came out to learn the cause of it. He handed her the letter and said:

“You had better ask H  l  ne to bring her out for the Summer. I would like to get acquainted with the child. A few months of this life would do them both good.”

Mrs. Travis hailed this new and promising symptom, and forthwith sat down to write H  l  ne Doyle an urgent letter to come and bring the little girl for the remaining time. She ended her letter by saying that in the Fall, if Benedict was well enough, the three could go back to the city, much benefited by the outing.

H  l  ne read the letter over and over several times. She was alone now, and could take time to nurse her much-wounded sentiment whenever she chose. She pondered over it all one afternoon, even while performing her other duties, and in the evening when she and little Helen sat down to dinner, she said, smilingly:

“How would you like it, dear, to go to Grand-

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mamma's to-morrow, and stay the rest of the Summer?"

"Oh!" cried the child, in a burst of gleeful hand-clapping, "and you go too, Aunt H  l  ne?"

"Yes; after a time. I could not go for so long. There is too much to do at home; besides, Grand-mamma would tire of such prolonged visitors. It is quite right for you to go. Willow Brook is your other home. Perhaps, towards the end of the Summer, I may go for a week."

"That will be nice," said little Helen. "Then you will come to bring me back to this home."

The child had formed the habit of accepting whatever Aunt H  l  ne said as the most proper and safest course for any one's conduct. So it happened that the next day little Helen went to Willow Brook with her nurse in the repaired French car, once more restored to M. Capet's directorship.

When the little girl left, H  l  ne felt that this was truly the end of all things for her. She went straight to her room to have it out with herself, and force herself to accept with equanimity the

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conditions which she, by her own act, had incurred. For the first time in her life, she neglected some of her daily duties. She did not scan the *Baltimore Sun*, which contained two items of peculiar interest to herself. One was the announcement of Benedict's book, which would appear during the latter part of August. The other was a statement concerning Mr. Atwood — in regard to the loss of more than two-thirds of his fortune.

This last piece of intelligence, when it came to her, turned the tide of her own emotions to the immediate consequences of the catastrophe.

She spent the remainder of the day writing to her mother, also to Angela. Her mind, a furnace of activity, tried to decide the probable subsequent movements of the family. Her chief concern was: Would their return interfere with her plan for spending a week at Willow Brook at the end of August? The Atwood ladies decided to remain, — as she learned the same week, — until nearly the end of October. It would take them at least till then to readjust

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themselves and their lives to the humiliating procedure of returning to Baltimore in an impoverished condition.

Hélène breathed more freely when she received the letter from her mother. She did not wish to disappoint Mrs. Travis. She wished to grant them a week simply to fulfil a duty and her promise to little Helen. The thought of going even then filled her with more dread than hopefulness. She was now convinced in her own mind that the week spent there would close the one chapter of her life that might have held some joy for her if she had not nipped it in the bud by her own arrogant self-righteousness and pride.

As she was sitting in the library, to have a quiet moment to herself, Lucy Hadley walked in. She had come for a confidential talk about her forthcoming marriage with Mr. Donnithorn. Dear little Lucy! Hélène was always willing and ready to talk with her upon any subject, and this one was uppermost in Lucy's tender heart.

"And yours will be next," she added with a knowing smile. Hélène's smile froze to the

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nipping intensity of the freezing-point, as she replied, with a faint sigh:

“My dear girl, you have not the faintest conception of how wide of the mark your words are.”

Lucy looked surprised and shocked, but did not venture to ask for an explanation.

In the course of the conversation, Hélène spoke of her mother's letter telling of the Atwood ladies' decision not to return to Baltimore until late in the Fall. Lucy, who had also read of the affair in the newspaper that day, was glad to hear it; she felt truly sorry for them.

Hélène was so disturbed that she could not sleep after she went to bed; not, at least, till the bitterness of her grief had been washed away by the burning tears that fell from her eyes.

The “decline and fall off” of the Atwood tyranny, as Sophie expressed it, was spread throughout the State of Maryland, where Mr. Atwood was well known. Almost every one thought kindly of him, for he had been the victim of some villain's treachery.

Another month went by, and Benedict's book

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was in the market. Hélène watched for every bit of comment on it and garnered them all faithfully in the rich portfolio of her retentive mind.

At the same time, the Travis household was mightily stirred up by the event. Father Travis, reading of it in his morning paper, stormed up to his son, who looked brightened and pleased by the news his father brought.

That same afternoon the Philosopher came bringing the first volume, bound in familiar legal calf.

Altogether the day was fraught with promise and hope of better things. Before retiring that night, Benedict kissed and fondled little Helen in a way that completely won her heart.

As he lay thinking, the scene of his rescue flashed vividly upon his mind. There he was in the face of death, sudden, terrifying, appalling, — death for which he had once longed. He did not know how dearly he loved life until now. He recognized the new-born feeling in his heart as nothing more nor less than love itself; love for those who had rescued him to life; love for his

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child whom he was now privileged to keep; love for the woman who had not only been the first one to check the flow of his ebbing life, but who had instilled into his daughter all the fundamental qualities of her own mind,—gentleness, the purity of truth, and loving fealty to himself. He felt that within the last two months he had literally been falling in love with his child, and that he was not ashamed of its outward manifestation. He acknowledged only to himself, however, that the feeling in his heart rose to the sublime height of human joy when he thought of Hélène.

The change that had come over his life, as he felt its complete renewal, found him void of the poignant emotions that had held him in bondage so long. They faded from his memory like the scales of a loathsome disease. And it was under that compelling impulse that he had asked his mother to invite Hélène.

He spent much time in quiet but smiling cogitation. His mind reverted to his college days when he had steeped himself in the great poets, Dante, Catullus, Shakespeare, Milton. One day

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after reading “Paradise Lost,” and the canto on Man’s First Disobedience, he had himself blossomed into verse. It came to his mind at this time with all the freshness of its first spontaneity. But he thought also how applicable to my own case now!

THE RE-AWAKENING

High on the throne of my exalted mind,
I look above where mountains kiss the sky,
I dream of an eternal day;
The conflict o’er, the battle done,
Of sorrow vanquished, victories won!
The past enshrouded in the mist,
Sinks far below my rising sun;
The morning breaks, my spirit wakes,
Lo, I behold the King’s pathway!

“Not such tremendous poetry, but the idea is all right,” he said, and settled himself to await patiently—for he had learned the lesson of patience—until the time of Hélène’s coming.

Things have such a way of working themselves around for the best, at times, in this world. It seemed as if everything had veered auspiciously to bring about Hélène’s visit. Mrs. Travis, herself growing impatient, called up Hélène on the

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telephone. "Do come now, the month is waning rapidly, and we are having such gorgeous full moonlight nights. Little Helen is longing for a sight of her Aunt H  l  ne, and we all want you!"

H  l  ne promised to start the next morning under the guardianship of Monsieur Capet.

The little girl clapped her hands with glee.

"Oh, I cannot wait till morning," she said at the supper table when she heard of it.

"You must, my daughter," said Benedict. "You are not the only one who has been waiting."

She was so in the habit of obeying that she resigned herself at once.

"Father, is Aunt H  l  ne any relation to us?"

"None whatever."

The child thought a moment.

"Well, I don't care if she is n't. She acts and talks to me like one!"

"There's no telling how soon she may be," put in the Major, with a twinkling eye.

"Now, Father Travis," warned his wife, "don't try to force anything. Let love affairs as

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well as everything else take their own natural course.”

The next morning they were all up bright and early to receive and to welcome the visitor. It was Benedict himself who went alone to meet her at the gate. They walked side by side through the long orchard back to the house. Every one hailed her coming, even the servants.

Hélène was more and more mystified by the great change that had come over Benedict. He seemed not to have the least recollection of that scene between them which had been ever present in her mind. The time for her departure was nearing; and it became harder and harder for her to take the first step in the act of a separation which she herself had brought about.

As the days succeeded one another, she grew more pensive, and lost some of the brightness which Benedict's nearness had brought to her own countenance. He, too, was thoughtful and silent at times. Each heart had revealed itself to the other with all its history of past experience. Benedict, until his trouble came, had

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been as free and open as the day, while H  l  ne, being a fine, sensitive woman, had hidden her secret deeply from all eyes but his.

It was the last day of August. A new moon hung overhead like an opal jewel on the bluish tint of on-coming night, faintly studded with stars. They were sitting on one of the broad verandas, viewing the scene. After a while, as the silence grew a little oppressive, H  l  ne said:

“You are looking and seeming so very much better, now, Benedict, I see no reason for prolonging my stay as a ‘sunshine’ emissary. I hope that in a few weeks, when you return to Baltimore, you will sometimes renew your visits to us.”

She was startled to see how pale he turned. He was not so strong, perhaps, as she had fancied.

Benedict was now passing through that vital parabola which inevitably occurs to a man at some curve of his life, and which betrays itself in the tell-tale change of features, the pallid cheek or lip, the luminous intensity of the eye. There

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was another moment of silence, and then he said, with more force than she had expected:

“No, Hélène, you shall not go from me, from us! You must remain with me, now. It is to you I owe my life; with you, I live and die! I have offended you, and behaved like a brute. I have taken your friendship and your interest all these years for granted. I have drawn constantly upon the never-failing fount of your glorious womanhood, sapping the best of your life. You bore with me in patience; you comforted me in sorrow; you have wrested me from the jaws of death itself; and you have been ministering to me ever since. All this you have done for me: What have I done, in return, for you?”

Hélène had risen and walked to the edge of the veranda. She leaned against its withered ramblers. She was unnerved, for there was a note of passion in his voice she had never heard there before.

Benedict rose and followed her. He went on:

“During my long period of recovery, I have had time to think. A life-long devotion deserves

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more than gratitude. Mine, at present, is bankrupt; and, in that case, nothing but Love can pay the debt!" He ended with effective simplicity: "And God knows I love you."

He moved near to her now. He dared not take her hand. He only looked into her eyes to read his expected answer. "Will you take me, in spite of my faults? I have learned to love you and only you! Don't tell me that my offence is irreparable; I have strength, and health, and love enough to blot it out forever!"

The look she gave him in return was one he had never seen on her face before. The smile, the all-concealing smile of former days, had vanished; and one of inexpressible joy illumined her countenance.

"You have, by these words, made payment in full," she said, in her low voice. "This is the real Love; I need not question it now."

Then he folded her in his arms, and held her a moment, her head resting on his breast, as he murmured, "My darling!"

"One by one, year by year, century by cen-

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ture, the stones were laid that built the great pyramids of Egypt; and they are everlasting," he said. "So day by day, and year by year your deeds of patient endurance, gentleness, and kindness have raised in my heart the indestructible pyramid of Love!"

"But you are teaching me the meaning of heaven upon earth," she murmured dreamily.

"And what is heaven, if not the vision of noblest desire fulfilled!" And he put his lips to her shining hair.

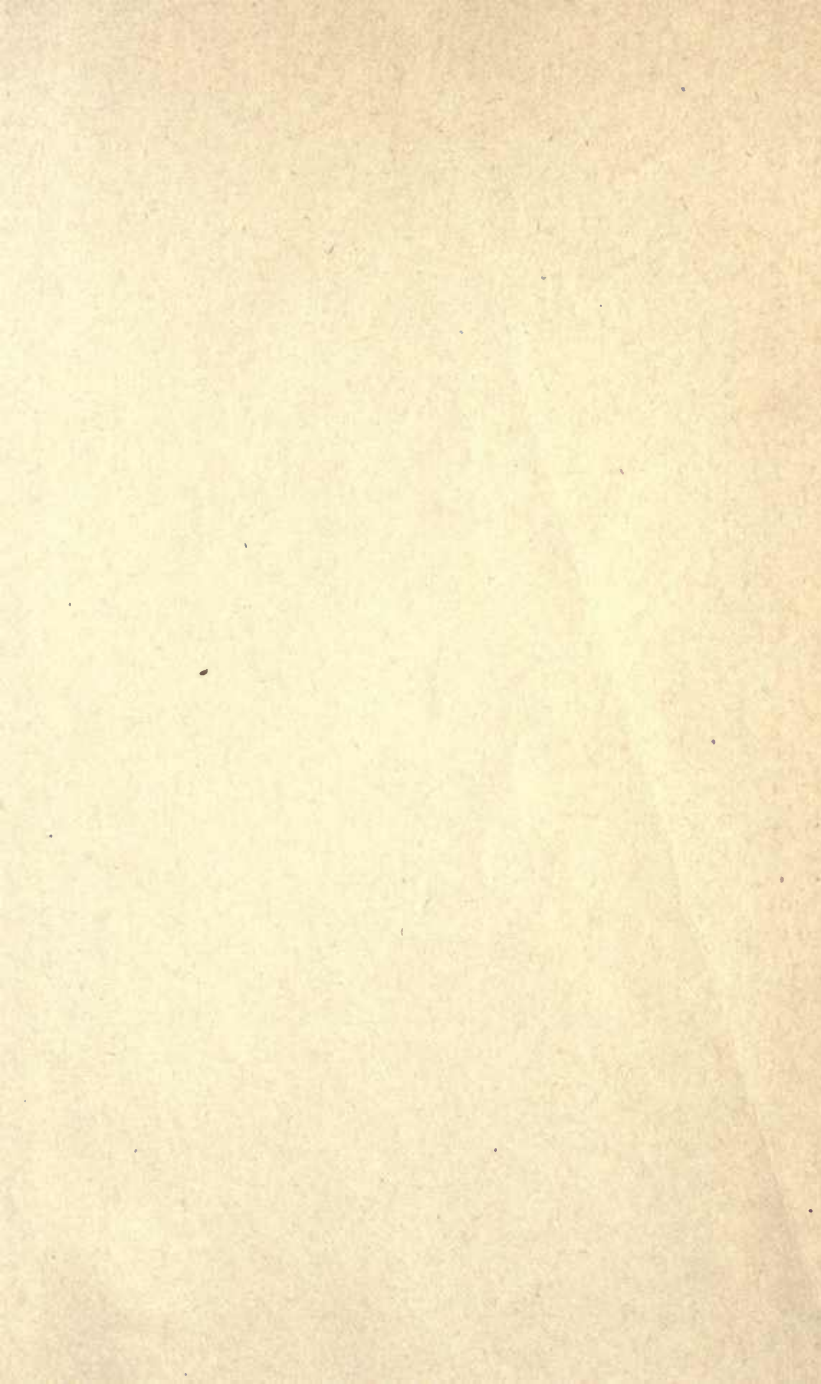
"Then heaven is not far away."

"How can it be, when an angel stands at its portals!"

"But the angels of old are spoken of as, 'two young men.'"

"One of them has grown older; and with the years has learned wisdom, as taught by you. For, after all, it is wisdom which forms the true spiritual bread of the world."

THE END



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